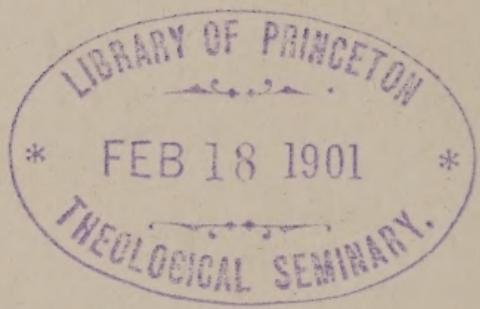


ELECT INFANTS

J. V. STEPHENS, D.D.



BT 758 .S833

Stephens, John Vant, 1857-
1946.

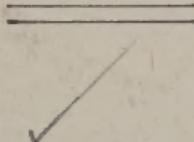
Elect infants

No. ~~1000~~

ELECT INFANTS;

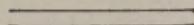
OR,

Infant Salvation in the Westminster
Symbols.



BY J. V. STEPHENS, D.D.,

Murdock Professor of Ecclesiastical History
in the Theological Seminary,
Lebanon, Tennessee.



NASHVILLE, TENN.:
CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN PUBLISHING HOUSE.
1900.

PREFACE.

The doctrine of infant salvation has been one of peculiar interest in the history of the Church. Strange as it may now seem, the general position of the universal Church, from the days of Augustine to the close of the seventeenth century, was that some infants dying in infancy are lost. Even in the nineteenth century there were Protestant theologians who would not affirm that all who die in infancy are saved.

Interesting as the question is, as applied to the Church universal, the present inquiry pertains to this doctrine, historically considered, in the Westminster symbols, only. But since the Westminster Confession of Faith is deeply rooted in Augustinian and Calvinistic soil, it will be necessary, first, to consider some preliminary questions, in order that the reader may have a better understanding of this Confession, and the times and the spirit in which it was made.

This little book is written in response to numerous inquiries as to the historical setting of the doctrine of infant salvation as set forth in this Confession of Faith. The subject is not

treated exhaustively, but briefly, in short chapters, so that busy people, for whom this work has been especially written, may find time to read it.

Many of the valuable, rare old books bearing on the subject in hand have not been accessible to the writer. For facts gleaned from them he is indebted to various authors, acknowledgment of which will be found in the appropriate places. Those who are cited as authorities are allowed, as far as possible, to speak in their own words. This will enable the reader to interpret their language for himself.

The author makes no claim to originality. His purpose has been simply to collect and classify the teachings of various confessions and the writings of various authors, which contribute to the matter under consideration. It is believed that there is need for just such a work as this is intended to be, in order to encourage confessional studies on the part of those who do not have access to the general literature of the subject. This little book is given to the public with the hope that it may inspire a deeper interest in the historical studies connected with our Reformed Confessions of Faith.

J. V. STEPHENS.

Theological Seminary, Lebanon, Tenn.,
May 17, 1900.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Alexander, Dr. Archibald, Life of. New York,
1854.

Articles, The, of the Synod of Dort. 1619.

Augustine, Saint, Against Two Letters of the
Pelagians in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.
New York, 1887.

Augustine, Saint, On Marriage and Concupis-
cence, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.
New York, 1887.

Augustine, Saint, On the Merits and Forgive-
ness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants,
in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. New
York, 1887.

Augustine, Saint, On the Grace of Christ, and
on Original Sin, in Nicene and Post-Nicene
Fathers. New York, 1887.

Augustine, Saint, the Enchiridion, in Nicene
and Post-Nicene Fathers. New York, 1887.

Boston Ministers, Principles of the Protestant
Religion Maintained, etc. Boston, 1690.

Briggs, Dr. C. A., Whither? New York, 1889.

Briggs, Dr. C. A., American Presbyterianism.
New York, 1885.

Burgess, Anthony, A Treatise of Original Sin.
London, 1658.

Calvin, John, *Institutes*, two volumes; translated by John Allen, Sixth American Edition, Revised and Corrected. Philadelphia.

Cumberland Presbyterian Confession of Faith.

Cumberland Presbyterian Review, Vol. I. Nashville, 1889.

Dickinson, Jonathan, *Sermons and Tracts*. Edinburgh, 1793.

Edwards, President, *Works* of, in four volumes. New York, 1852.

Emmons, Dr. Nathaniel, *System of Divinity*, two volumes. Boston, 1842.

Fisher, Dr. George P., *History of the Christian Church*. New York, 1898.

Fisher, Dr. George P., *History of Christian Doctrine*. New York, 1896.

Fisher, Dr. George P., *History of the Reformation*. New York, 1891.

Hagenbach, Dr. K. R., *History of Doctrines*, two volumes; the Edinburgh translation revised by Henry B. Smith, D.D. New York, 1861.

Hetherington, Rev. W. M., A.M., *History of the Church of Scotland*. New York, 1859.

Hodge, Dr. Charles, *Commentary on Romans*. Philadelphia, 1870.

Hodge, Dr. Charles, *Systematic Theology*, three volumes. New York, 1884.

Hodge, Dr. A. A., Article, *Calvinism in Schaff-Herzog*.

Hodge, Dr. A. A., *Commentary on the Confession of Faith*. Philadelphia, 1869.

How Shall We Revise? Edited by Dr. C. A. Briggs. New York, 1890.

Hurst, Dr. J. F., *Short History of the Christian Church*. New York, 1893.

Irish Articles. 1615.

Keith, George, *The Presbyterian and Independent Visible Churches in New England and Elsewhere Brought to the Test*. London, 1691.

Krauth, Dr. C. P., *Infant Baptism and Infant Salvation in the Calvinistic System*. Philadelphia, 1874.

Kurtz, Dr. J. H., *Church History*, two volumes. Philadelphia, 1892.

Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., for 1892 and 1893.

Minutes of the Westminster Assembly.

Mitchell, Dr. A. F., *The Westminster Assembly*. Philadelphia, 1897.

Morris, Edward, D., D.D., LL.D., *Theology of the Westminster Symbols*. Columbus, Ohio, 1900.

Orme, Rev. William, *Life and Times of Richard Baxter*. Boston, 1831.

Ought the Confession of Faith to be Revised? New York, 1890.

Pope, Dr. W. B., *Compendium of Christian Theology*, three volumes. New York.

Prentiss, Prof. George L., D.D., *Presbyterian Review*, Vol. IV. New York, 1883.

Ridgeley, Dr. Thomas, *Body of Divinity*, two volumes. New York, 1855.

Schaff, Dr. Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. III. New York, 1893.

Schaff, Dr. Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII. New York, 1894.

Schaff, Dr. Philip, *Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. I. New York, 1877.

Schaff, Dr. Philip, *Creed Revision in the Presbyterian Churches*. New York, 1890.

Shedd, Dr. W. G. T., *Dogmatic Theology*, two volumes. New York, 1888.

Shedd, Dr. W. G. T., *Proposed Revision of the Westminster Standards*. New York, 1890.

Shields, Charles W., D.D., *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, Vol. I. New York, 1890.

Smith, Dr. Henry B., *System of Christian Theology*. New York, 1897.

Stearns, Dr. L. F., *Present Day Theology*. New York, 1893.

Warfield, Dr. B. B., *Introductory Essay on Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy*, in Vol. V., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. New York, 1887.

Warfield, Dr. B. B., *The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation.* New York, 1891.

Van Dyke, Dr. Henry J., *The Variations of Calvinism.* New York, 1890.

Van Dyke, Dr. Henry J., *God and Little Children.* New York, 1890.

Watson, Richard, *Theological Institutes,* two volumes. New York, 1850.

Watts, Isaac, D.D., *Work* (Leeds Edition), Vol. III.

Westminster Confession of Faith.

Wiggers, G. F., D.D., *Historical Presentation of Augustinism and Pelagianism* (Emerson's Translation). Andover, 1840.

Wilson, Dr. J. P., *An Essay on the Probation of Fallen Men.* Philadelphia, 1827.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

Introduction	1
--------------------	---

CHAPTER II.

The Augustinian System.....	7
-----------------------------	---

CHAPTER III.

John Calvin and His Work.....	21
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

Was Calvin a Supralapsarian or an Infra-lapsarian?.....	25
---	----

CHAPTER V.

Calvin Taught That Some Infants Dying in Infancy Are Lost.....	39
---	----

CHAPTER VI.

The Synod of Dort.....	55
------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII.

The Westminster Assembly.....	69
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VIII.

Opinions of Some Westminster Divines ..	99
---	----

CHAPTER IX.

Opinions of Some Other Divines.....	119
-------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER X.

The Transition in Interpretation	147
(xi)	

ELECT INFANTS;
or,
INFANT SALVATION IN THE
WESTMINSTER SYMBOLS.

I.

Introduction.

“Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth. So also are other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word.”¹

The correct interpretation of the foregoing section of the Westminster Confession of Faith has occasioned no little amount of discussion. Some maintain that by a fair construction of language it means that

¹ Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. X., Sec. iii.

only a part of those dying in infancy are saved; that the expression “elect infants” implies, at least, that there must be *non-elect* infants. There are others, however, who claim that the words “elect infants, dying in infancy” have reference to *all* who die in infancy, and not to a *part* only, in other words that all who die in infancy are of the “elect.” It is, moreover, worthy of note that in the class who place the first interpretation on this language are to be found a large number who have formally subscribed to the Westminster Confession of Faith “as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.” In 1892 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, which is by far the largest Presbyterian Church in the world, sent down to its presbyteries an overture proposing to change this section so as to make it read as follows:¹ “Infants dying in infancy and all other persons not guilty of actual trans-

¹ Minutes of the Assembly, 1892, p. 134.

gression, are included in the election of grace, and are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth.” The report shows that 105 presbyteries voted in favor of the proposed change, while 68 voted against it.¹ This proposed change was not effected because it did not receive the “constitutional two-thirds majority.”² While no change was made in the Confession, yet this test showed a wide dissent in the Presbyterian Church from the Confessional statement. The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland in its “Declaratory Act” affirms that “in accepting the Standards it is not required to be held that any who die in infancy are lost.”³ “The Declaratory Act of the Free Church of Scotland” (section three), “with some caution, affirms” that, “while the gospel is the ordinary means of salvation for those to whom it is made

¹ *Ibid.*, 1893, pp. 187, 188.

² *Ibid.*, 1893, p. 198.

³ Declaratory Act, Sec. 4.

known, yet it does not follow, nor is the Confession to be held as teaching, that any who die in infancy are lost.” The Presbyterian Church of England omits from its new creed altogether any mention of “elect infants.” Perhaps all Presbyterians to-day, with the rest of the Protestant world generally, believe that all who die in infancy are saved.

But does this view agree with the historic interpretation of the Westminster Confession of faith? The historic setting of a Confession of Faith frequently contributes as much to explain what it was designed to teach, in certain of its articles, as its own phraseology. This is especially true of the doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith on the subject of “elect infants.” It is to the historic interpretation of this section that the author addresses himself in this treatise.

In the present discussion it is assumed that the writers of the New Testament teach nothing contrary to the idea that all

those who die in infancy are saved. Such then must have been the doctrine, so far as it had been developed, of the Apostolic Church. The same, perhaps, may be affirmed of the teaching of the Post-Apostolic Church. Before the close of the second century *baptism* came to mean, in the minds of the Fathers, the same thing as *regeneration*, whether applied to *infants* or *adults*. So at this early date the Church came to hold that baptism was necessary to salvation. This being true neither infant nor adult could be saved who had not received the ordinance of baptism, excepting such as received the baptism of blood, or the baptism of intention. Dr. K. R. Hagenbach observes that¹ "the doctrine of baptism stands in intimate connection with the doctrine of the Church. From the founding of Christianity great efficacy was attached to baptism in relation to the forgiveness of sins and to regeneration. Some of the Fathers, especially Irenæus, Tertullian, and

¹ History of Doctrines, Vol. I., p. 197.

Cyprian, in treating of this subject, as well as of the doctrine of the Church, often indulge in exaggerated, fanciful, and absurd allegories, and symbolisms, while Origen draws a more distinct line between the external sign and the thing signified."

II.

The Augustinian System.

Augustine (354-430) was one of the greatest of the Fathers. He prepared the way for Catholicism by his doctrine of the Church, and, at the same time, the way for the Reformers by his doctrine of sin and grace. He was able, to a certain extent, to unite the extremes which “stand historically opposed to each other.” Dr. Philip Schaff thinks that “the Reformers were led by his writings into a deeper understanding of Paul, and so prepared for their great vocation.” He continues,¹ “No Church teacher did so much to mold Luther and Calvin; none furnished them so powerful weapons against the dominant Pelagianism and formalism; none is so often quoted by them with esteem and love.”

¹ History of the Christian Church, Vol. III., p. 1022.

There is no doubt that this great thinker had a strong influence over the Roman Catholic Church of a later date as well as over the Reformers. The Reformation produced three great divisions or Churches, namely, the Lutheran, the Anglican, and the Reformed or Presbyterian. It would be interesting to trace the Augustinian influence on the doctrine of infant salvation as developed in the Lutheran and Anglican Churches, but that is beyond the present purpose. It is well known that Calvin and other leaders of the Reformed Churches substantially accepted and developed Augustine's doctrine of *predestination*. The Westminster Confession of Faith is one of the principal creeds produced by the Reformed Churches; hence it is pertinent to inquire what, if any, influence the writings of Augustine had on the statement as made in Chapter X., Section 3, of this Confession, "Elect infants, dying in infancy," etc.

According to Augustine "original sin and guilt are propagated by natural generation.

The generic character planted in Adam unfolds itself in a succession of individuals, who organically grow one out of another.” Augustine teaches that¹ “it is manifest that all have sinned in Adam, as it were in the mass; for he himself was corrupted by sin, and all whom he begot were born under sin.” And again,² “They are all born under condemnation of the first Adam; not only those who are born in adultery, but likewise such as are born in wedlock, unless they be regenerated in the second Adam, which is Christ.” “Nor, indeed,” he continues,³ “are those sins of infancy so said to be *another's* as if they had not belonged to the infants at all, inasmuch as all then sinned in Adam, when in his nature, by virtue of that innate power whereby he was able to produce them, they were all as yet the one Adam;

¹ Against Two Letters of the Pelagians. B. IV., Ch. 7.

² On Marriage and Concupiscence, B. II., Ch. 35.

³ On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism, B. III., Ch. 14.

but they are called *another's*, because as yet they were not living their own lives, but the life of the one man contained whatsoever was in his future posterity." In view of what has been quoted, it is not surprising to hear him inquire:¹ "On what account, therefore, is an infant rightly punished with such ruin, if it be not because he belongs to the mass of perdition, and is properly regarded as born of Adam, condemned under the bond of the ancient debt unless he has been released from the bond, not according to debt, but according to grace?"

But by what means, according to the teaching of Augustine, could these infants be released from "the bond of the ancient debt?" The answer to this question is two-fold. First by means of baptism, and second through God's eternal decrees. In reference to the first, Dr. Hagenbach summarizes his position as follows:² "Every man is born in sin, and stands, therefore, in need

¹ On Original Sin, B. II., Ch. 36.

² History of Doctrines, Vol. I., p. 360.

of pardon. He obtains this by baptism; it cleanses children from *original sin*, and those who are baptized in later years, not only from original sin, but also from their actual transgressions before the baptism. Since baptism is the only and necessary condition of salvation, it follows that unbaptized children are condemned." And the same may be affirmed of unbaptized adults, according to Augustine's theory.

That Dr. Hagenbach, in the foregoing extract, fairly represents the doctrine of this Church Father (Augustine), is proved from the following selections from his writings:¹ "For from the infant newly born to the old man bent with age, as there is none shut out from baptism, so there is none who in baptism does not die to sin. But infants die only to original sin; those who are older die also to all the sins which their evil lives have added to the sin which they brought with them." Here it is plainly taught that baptism removes original sin in infants, and

¹The Enchiridion, Ch. 43.

both original sin and actual transgression in adults. Again Augustine says:¹ “Now if they who are baptized are, by virtue of the excellence and administration of so great a sacrament, nevertheless reckoned in the number of the faithful, although by their own heart and mouth they do not literally perform what appertains to the action of faith and confession; surely they who have lacked the sacrament must be classed amongst those who do not believe on the Son, and therefore, if they shall depart this life without this grace, they will have to encounter what is written concerning such —they shall not have life, but the wrath of God abideth on them.” But Augustine believed in the mildest punishment for unbaptized infants who pass into the next world. “It may therefore be correctly affirmed,” said he,² “that such infants as quit the body without being baptized will be involved

¹On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism, B. I., Ch. 28.

²*Ibid.*, Ch. 20.

in the mildest condemnation of all.” It was of such that Dante wrote:¹

“Inquirest thou not what spirits
Are these which thou beholdest? Ere thou pass
Further, I would thou know, that these of sin
Were blameless; and of it aught they merited,
It profits not, since baptism was not theirs,
The portal to thy faith.”

But it has been said that the second part of the twofold answer to the question, which is under consideration, is based on God’s eternal decrees. On this point Dr. G. P. Fisher states Augustine’s position as follows:² “A study of Augustine’s writings reveals to us two discordant veins of thought. There are two currents, and they flow in opposite directions. On the one hand, there is the common Catholic ecclesiasticism, in which he lived and moved, and which as a rule shapes his doctrinal statements. On the other hand, there is the great idea of the Church spiritual and in-

¹ *Inferno*, Canto IV., Cary’s Translation.

² *History of Doctrine*, pp. 192, 193.

visible, composed of the saints elect. This Church is included within the ecclesiastical body. The latter is a *corpus permixtum*. Election does not cleave to the sacraments. They have no saving efficacy for the non-elect." Dr. Fisher says that "from the sinfulness and impotency of all men, Augustine deduced the doctrine of unconditional predestination." Dr. Hagenbach gives the following concise statement of Augustine's doctrine of predestination:¹ "Augustine held the doctrine of hereditary depravity, the guilt of which man has himself incurred, and from which no human power or human determination can deliver; from which only the grace of God can save those to whom it is imparted. From these premises it would necessarily follow that God, in consequence of an eternal decree, and without any reference to the future conduct of man, has elected some out of the corrupt mass to become vessels of his mercy (*vasa misericordiae*), and left the rest as vessels of

¹ History of Doctrines, Vol. I., p. 304.

his wrath (*vasa iræ*) to a just condemnation. Augustine called the former *predestinatio*, the latter *reprobatio*, and thus evaded the necessity of directly asserting the doctrine of a predestination to evil (*predestinatio duplex*). On the whole, he endeavored to soften the harshness of his theory by practical cautions.” Numerous quotations from the writings of this Father could be cited to show that Dr. Fisher and Dr. Hagenbach have represented him correctly as to his doctrine of predestination, but it is hardly necessary to cite them.

But it has been said that there are “two discordant veins of thought” in the writings of Augustine, that of ecclesiasticism, and that of predestination. How are these to be harmonized in the Augustinian system? When Augustine “comes to speak of the means of grace, i. e., of the channels and circumstances of its conference to men,” Dr. B. B. Warfield says that¹ “he

¹On Augustine and Pelagian Controversy, p. lxx.

approaches the meeting point of two very dissimilar streams of his theology,—his doctrine of grace and his doctrine of the Church,—and he is sadly deflected from the natural course of his theology by the alien influence. He does not, indeed, bind the conference of grace to the means in such a sense that the grace must be given at the exact time of the application of the means. He does not deny that ‘God is able, even when no man rebukes, to correct whom he will, and to lead him on to the wholesome mortification of repentance by the most hidden and most mighty power of his medicine.’ Though the gospel must be known in order that man may be saved (for how shall they believe without a preacher?), yet the preacher is nothing, and the preaching is nothing, but God only that gives the increase. He even has something like a distant glimpse of what has since been called the distinction between the visible and invisible Church,—speaking of men not yet born as among those who are ‘called according to God’s pur-

pose,' and, therefore, of the saved who constitute the Church,—asserting that those who are so called, even before they believe, are 'already children of God, enrolled in the memorial of their Father with unchangeable surety,' and, at the same time, allowing that there are many already in the visible Church who are not of it, and who can therefore depart from it. But he teaches that those who are thus lost out of the visible Church are lost because of some fatal flaw in their baptism, or on account of post-baptismal sins; and that those who are of the 'called according to the purpose' are predestinated not only to salvation, but to salvation by baptism. Grace is not tied to the means in the sense that it is not conferred save in the means; but it is tied to the means in the sense that it is not conferred without the means. Baptism, for instance, is absolutely necessary for salvation: no exception is allowed except such as save the principle,—baptism of blood (martyrdom), and, somewhat grudgingly,

baptism of intention. And baptism, when worthily received, is absolutely efficacious: 'If a man were to die immediately after baptism, he would have nothing at all left to hold him liable to punishment.' In a word, while there are many baptized who will not be saved, there are none saved who have not been baptized; it is the grace of God that saves, but baptism is a channel of grace without which none receive it.'"

Dr. G. F. Wiggers observes that¹ "as Augustine taught, that all men would be saved if God willed it, so he could not deny, that many would not be saved because the Almighty divine will has not willed their salvation. Hence he says, in reference to children who die before baptism: 'Many are not saved, not because themselves do not will, but because God does not will it.' But this always means only so many as the decree of election does not reach. That Augustine considered those who will not be

¹ Historical Presentation of Augustinism and Pelagianism, p. 245.

saved as damned on account of Adam's sin, in which the whole race have participated, may be seen from the passages now to be adduced for Augustine's opinions just stated." So it is clear that Augustine believed that some children dying in infancy are lost. Those who are saved are saved because God wills it, and those who are lost are lost because God wills it. He wills that the former class shall receive the ordinance of baptism, the "channel of grace" unto salvation.

$\gamma_{\text{eff}}^{\text{d}}$

III.

John Calvin and His Work.

John Calvin (1509-1564) was one of the greatest of the Reformers. At the age of 27 years, he wrote the *Institutes*. "He came forward at a moment when the ideas of the Reformation were widely diffused, but when no adequate reduction of them to a systematic form had been achieved. The dogmatic treatise of Melancthon, meritorious though it be, was of comparatively limited scope. The field was for the most part open; and when Calvin appeared upon it, he was at once recognized as fully competent for his task, greeted by Melancthon himself as 'the theologian.' By the enemies of Protestantism his work was styled 'the Koran of the heretics.' Of the clearness, coherence, and symmetry of all its discussions there is no need to speak. It is remarkable that the theological opinions of Calvin remained un-

changed from the time of his conversion to his death.”¹ Dr. Howard Crosby, an eminent Presbyterian divine, said:² “Calvin adopted the extreme views of Augustine, and pressed them, as did Augustine, under the plea of logic, but it is just here, where these good men left God’s word for their logical inferences, that they go astray. The semi-Pelagians were a rebuke to Augustine, and justly so. The Arminians were still more justly a rebuke to the Calvinism of the Reformation. The Heidelberg and Westminster Confessions, with all their excellence (and no symbols can compare with them for clear statement of Scripture truth), have the philosophic defects to which we refer, and which are the dead flies in the apothecary’s ointment.” Dr. Schaff says:³ “Calvin was, first of all, a theologian. He

¹ Fisher’s History of the Reformation, p. 199.

² Cumberland Presbyterian Review, Vol. I., p. 415.

³ History of the Christian Church, Vol. VII., p. 260.

easily takes the lead among the systematic expounders of the Reformed system of Christian doctrine. He is scarcely inferior to Augustine among the Fathers, or Thomas Aquinas among the Schoolmen, and more methodical and symmetrical than either." Again he writes:¹ "The Calvinistic system is popularly (though not quite correctly) identified with the Augustinian system, and shares its merits as a profound exposition of the Pauline doctrines of sin and grace, but also its fundamental defect of confining the saving grace of God and the atoning work of Christ to a small circle of the elect, and ignoring the general love of God to all mankind." Calvin differs from Augustine on the doctrine of ecclesiasticism, holding that in the case of the non-elect, baptism is an unmeaning ceremony.

Dr. L. F. Stearns says:² "The earlier Protestants consented to the doctrine of in-

¹ History of the Christian Church, Vol. VII., p. 261.

² Present Day Theology, p. 416.

fant damnation, the Lutherans, like the Roman Catholics, consigning unbaptized infants to perdition, and the Calvinists taking the same ground with respect to non-elect infants.” Dr. Charles W. Shields, a Professor in Princeton Theological Seminary, writes:¹ “Romanists had their *limbus infantum*, where the hapless little souls of the unbaptized were left to pine for the beautiful vision. Protestants soon began to reconstruct the doctrine with morbid distinctions, consigned them to a negative hell of mere loss, or to a more positive hell of mild suffering, or to the lowest hell of the reprobate.” Indeed it may be affirmed that from the days of Augustine until after the time John Calvin lived, “all Christians, except a few heretics, believed in infant damnation.”

¹ Presbyterian and Reformed Review, Vol. I., p. 638.

IV.

Was Calvin a Supralapsarian or an Infralapsarian?

The words supralapsarian and infralapsarian do not occur prior to the meeting of the Synod of Dort (1618-19), hence the terms were not used or known in the days of Calvin; yet supralapsarianism and infra- or sublapsarianism represent certain ideas in reference to the order of the divine decrees, which Calvin diligently considered, and one of which he must have adopted in preference to the other; hence it is perfectly legitimate to inquire as to his theory of the order of the divine decrees. Dr. W. G. T. Shedd defines these two doctrines as follows:¹ “The supralapsarian theory places, in the order of decrees, the decree of election and preterition before the fall, instead of after it. It supposes that God begins by

¹ Dogmatic Theology, Vol. I., pp. 442, 441.

decreeing that a certain number of men shall be elected, and reprobated. This decree is prior even to that of creation, in the logical order. The supralapsarian order of decrees is as follows: 1. The decree to elect some men to salvation, and to leave some to perdition, for the divine glory. 2. The decree to create the men thus elected, and reprobated. 3. The decree to permit them to fall. 4. The decree to justify the elect, and to condemn the non-elect.” The infra- or sublapsarian “order of the divine decrees is this: 1. The Decree to create man in holiness and blessedness. 2. The decree to permit man to fall by the self-determination of his own will. 3. The decree to save a definite number out of this guilty aggregate. 4. The decree to leave the remainder to their self-determination in sin, and to the righteous punishment which sin deserves.”

Dr. Charles Hodge says that according to the supralapsarian view¹ “God creates some to be saved, and others to be lost.” Again

¹Systematic Theology, Vol. II., pp. 316, 321.

he writes that the supralapsarians teach that "God selected a certain number of individual men to be created in order to salvation, and a certain number to be created to be vessels of wrath. It is in this way they subordinate creation to predestination as a means to an end. It is to this that infralapsarians object, as inconceivable, repugnant to the nature of God, and unscriptural."

Dr. Schaff writes:¹ "It was always felt by the majority of Reformed divines that by irresistible logic it [supralapsarianism] makes God the author of sin and death, and that it would consistently lead to hopeless fatalism and pantheism, from which the supralapsarians themselves shrink back with horror."

Dr. Fisher, in speaking of the difference between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism, says:² "The distinction pertains

¹ Creed Revision in the Presbyterian Churches, p. 47.

² History of Doctrine, pp. 300, 301.

to the relation of predestination to the fall of man—to the first sin. This was held by extreme Calvinists to be the object of an efficient decree, while the more moderate Calvinists made the decree relate to the fall, and to be only permissive. The supralapsarians, when they worked out their philosophy, made the final cause or end of the divine administration to be the manifestation of God's attributes,—of his justice in punishing, and of his mercy in saving. To accomplish this end creation is decreed, the fall after it, the election of part of mankind as objects of mercy, of another part as objects of punitive righteousness. This is the order of the divine purposes. This philosophy is crowned by the assumption that the privilege of the divine government needs no other defence than the bare fact of the divine decree, the will of God being the foundation, as well as the evidence or criterion, of righteousness. The infralapsarians, on the contrary, made election to be from those fallen by their own act into sin and

condemnation, an act of theirs in no degree necessitated by causes referable to God's power."

To which of these theories did Calvin hold? To the supralapsarian or infralapsarian? There are some, on the one hand, who believe that he was a supralapsarian, and point out certain selections from his writings to prove their contention; while there are others, on the other hand, who think that he was an infralapsarian, and likewise refer to passages from his pen in justification of their claim. "If we had nothing to guide us but the *Institutes*," says Dr. Fisher,¹ "we should say without hesitation that Calvin was a supralapsarian." But he continues: "Elsewhere, in the *Agreement by the Genoese Pastors*, he speaks more guardedly, and does not overstep the picture of Augustine, from whom he quotes with approbation. He asserts merely a permissive decree—a volitive permission—in the case of the first sin." In this connection

¹ History of Doctrine, p. 301.

it must be remembered that the same author affirms in another connection¹ that “the theological opinions of Calvin remained unchanged from the time of his conversion to his death.”

Dr. Charles Hodge says:² “The position of Calvin himself as to this point has been disputed. As it was not in his day a special matter of discussion, certain passages may be quoted from his writings which favor the supralapsarian, and other passages which favor the infralapsarian view.”

The *Institutes* were his greatest work. Dr. A. A. Hodge writes:³ “Although Calvin was not the first to formulate the system which goes by his name, to him, nevertheless, justly belongs the praise of presenting to the world the first and grandest work of systematic divinity,—of recasting Augustinianism in its Protestant form, and of

¹ History of the Reformation, p. 199.

² Systematic Theology, Vol. II., p. 316.

³ Art. “Calvinism,” Schaff-Herzog Encyclo-pædia.

handing it to the modern world stamped with its great author's name." Prof. John Allen, who translated the *Institutes* from the original Latin into English, has this to say of that work:¹ "How many editions it passed through during his [Calvin's] life it is difficult, if not impossible, now to ascertain; but it obtained a very extensive circulation, and was reprinted several times, and every time was further improved and enlarged by him, till, in the year 1559, twenty-three years after the first impression, he put the finishing hand to his work, and published it in Latin and French, with his last corrections and additions." This was five years before his death. The presumption, therefore, is that the *Institutes*, "the first and grandest work of systematic divinity," to which the author "put the finishing hand" "with his last corrections and additions" only five years before his death, must represent the author's position on these, as

¹ Preface to his translation, p. 8.

well as on other questions of which he treats. A few selections are taken from the *Institutes* bearing on the present inquiry.

“When they perish in their corruption, therefore, they only suffer the punishment of that misery into which, in consequence of his predestination, Adam fell, and precipitated his posterity with him. Is he not unjust, therefore, in treating his creatures with such cruel mockery? I confess, indeed, that all the descendants of Adam fell by the divine will into that miserable condition in which they are now involved; and this is what I asserted from the beginning, that we must always return at last to the sovereign determination of God’s will, the cause of which is hidden in himself.”¹

“The covenant of life not being equally preached to all, and among those to whom it is preached not always finding the same reception, this diversity discovers the wonderful depth of the divine judgment. Nor is it to be doubted that this variety also fol-

¹ Institutes, Book III., Ch. xxiii., Sec. 4.

lows, subject to the decision of God's eternal election. If it be evidently the result of the divine will, that salvation is freely offered to some, and others are prevented from attaining it—this immediately gives rise to important and difficult questions, which are incapable of any other explication, than by the establishment of pious minds in what ought to be received concerning election and predestination—a question, in the opinion of many, full of perplexity; for they consider nothing more unreasonable than that, of the common mass of mankind, some should be predestinated to salvation, and others to destruction. But how unreasonably they perplex themselves will afterwards appear from the sequel of our discourse.”¹

“In conformity, therefore, to the clear doctrine of the Scripture, we assert that, by an eternal and immutable counsel, God has once for all determined, both whom he would admit to salvation, and whom he would condemn to destruction. We affirm that

¹ *Ibid.*, Ch. xxi., Sec. 1.

this counsel, as far as concerns the elect, is founded on his gratuitous mercy, totally irrespective to human merit; but that to those whom he devotes to condemnation the gate of life is closed by a just and irreprehensible, but incomprehensible, judgment. In the elect, we consider calling as an evidence of election, and justification as another token of its manifestation, till they arrive in glory, which constitutes its completion. As God seals his elect by vocation and justification, so by excluding the reprobate from the knowledge of his name and the sanctification of his Spirit, he affords an indication of the judgment that awaits them.”¹

“Whom God passes by, therefore, he reprobates, and from no other cause than his determination to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his children. And the petulance of men is intolerable, if it refuses to be restrained by the word of God, which treats of his incomprehensible counsel, adored by angels them-

¹ *Ibid.*, Sec. 7.

selves. But now we have heard that hardening proceeds from the divine power and will, as much as mercy. Unlike the persons I have mentioned, Paul never strives to excuse God by false allegations; he only declares that it is unlawful for a thing formed to quarrel with its maker. Now, how will those who admit not that any are reprobated by God, evade this declaration of Christ: ‘Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up?’ Upon all whom our heavenly Father has not deigned to plant as sacred trees in his garden, they hear destruction plainly denounced. If they deny this to be a sign of reprobation, there is nothing so clear as to be capable of proof to such persons. But if they cease not their clamor, let the sobriety of faith be satisfied with this admonition of Paul, that there is no cause for quarreling with God, if, on the one hand, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, he endures, ‘with much long-suffering, the vessels of wrath fitted to de-

struction; and on the other, makes ‘known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, whom he hath afore prepared unto glory.’”¹

“I say, with Augustine, that the Lord created those who, he certainly foreknew, would fall into destruction, and that this was actually so because he willed it.”²

“Nor should it be thought absurd to affirm that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and the ruin of his posterity in him, but also arranged all by the determination of his own will.”³

“Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which he has determined in himself what he would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is fore-ordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of

¹ *Ibid.*, Chap. xxiii., Sec. 1.

² *Ibid.*, Sec. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, Sec. 7.

these ends, we say, he is predestinated either to life or to death.”¹

Dr. W. B. Pope² has recorded it as a fact that “Calvin himself protested unconsciously against all among his followers who should soften his system of doctrine: ‘Many so preach election as to deny that any man is reprobated; but very ignorantly and childishly, since election itself would not stand unless opposed to reprobation.’” These citations from the *Institutes* seem clearly to establish the fact that Calvin was a supralapsarian some five years before his death, when he “put the finishing hand” “with his last corrections and additions” to his *Institutes*, “the first and grandest work of systematic divinity.”

Dr. Schaff, the great Presbyterian historian, shows that³ “Calvin carried the doctrine of the divine decrees beyond the Augus-

¹ *Ibid.*, Chap. xxi., Sec. 5.

² Compendium of Christian Theology, Vol. II., p. 353.

³ Creeds of Christendom, Vol. I., p. 453.

tinian infralapsarianism, which makes the fall of Adam the object of a permissive or passive decree, and teaches the preterition rather than the reprobation of the wicked, to the very verge of supralapsarianism, which traces even the first sin to an efficient or positive decree, analogous to that of election.”

Dr. Henry J. Van Dyke, an eminent Presbyterian divine, and Moderator of the General Assembly of the (Northern) Presbyterian Church, in 1876, believes that Calvin was a supralapsarian. With a degree of emphasis, he says:¹ “For myself I am free to declare that I utterly reject and loathe the theory, which my venerated teacher [Dr. Charles Hodge] declares to be ‘repugnant to the nature of God and unscriptural.’ If for rejecting this doctrine of Calvin any one accuses me of being no longer a Calvinist, the charge will not trouble me much. John Calvin was not crucified for me, neither was I baptized in his name.”

¹ *Variations of Calvinism*, p. 24.

V.

Calvin Taught That Some Infants Dying in Infancy Are Lost.

Having learned the doctrine of Calvin in reference to God's decrees, there is no occasion for surprise when his logical application shuts some of those who die in infancy out of heaven. But a few citations from his writings will make his position on this subject more apparent.

"Therefore infants themselves, as they bring their condemnation into the world with them, are rendered obnoxious to punishment by their own sinfulness, not by the sinfulness of another. For though they have not yet produced the fruits of their iniquity, yet they have the seed of it within them; even their whole nature is as it were a seed of sin, and therefore cannot but be odious and abominable to God. Whence it follows, that it is properly accounted sin

in the sight of God, because there could be no guilt without crime."¹ The ground of the condemnation of infants, according to the teaching of this language, grows out of his doctrine of original sin, in which, as has already been shown, he agreed substantially with Augustine. Moreover, except for the doctrine of election, all who die in infancy must be lost.

"And for this reason, Christ was sanctified from his earliest infancy, that he might sanctify in himself all his elect, of every age, without any difference. For as, in order to obliterate the guilt of the transgression which had been perpetrated in our flesh, he assumed to himself that very flesh, that he might perform a perfect obedience in it, on our account, and in our stead, so he was conceived of the Holy Spirit, that having the whole body which he assumed, fully endued with the sanctity of the Spirit, he might communicate the same to us. If Christ exhibits a perfect exemplar of all the

¹ Institutes, Book II., Chap. i., Sec. 8.

graces which God bestows upon his children, he will also furnish us with a proof that the age of infancy is not altogether incompatible with sanctification. But, however this may be, we consider it as clear, beyond all controversy, that not one of the elect is called out of the present life without having been previously regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of God.”¹ Since all have “the seed” of iniquity in them, those who are received into heaven must have “been previously regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of God;” and this is as true of infants as it is of those who have reached a mature age.

“It is certain that *some infants* are saved; and that they are previously regenerated by the Lord, is beyond all doubt.”² In the last quotation it was seen that *all*, both infants and adults, are involved in original sin, and that those who are saved must be regenerated. In this passage it is asserted that *some (not all)* infants are saved, being

² *Ibid.*, Book IV., Chap. xvi., Sec. 18.

² *Ibid.*, Sec. 17.

regenerated by the Lord. The presumption is that Calvin believed that there are *some* infants who are not saved.

Commenting on the foregoing words of Calvin, Dr. Schaff thinks that "he intimates very clearly that there are *reprobate* or non-elect children as well as reprobate adults. He says that '*some* infants,' having been previously regenerated by the Holy Spirit, 'are certainly saved,' but he nowhere says that *all* infants are saved. In his comments on Romans v. 17, he confines salvation to the infants of the *pious* (elect) parents, but leaves the fate of the rest more than doubtful."¹

But if there were any doubt that Calvin believed in the damnation of some infants, that doubt would vanish in the light of the following language: "As to infants they seem to perish not by their own fault but by the fault of another; but there is a double solution. Though sin does not yet appear

¹ History of the Christian Church, Vol. VII., p. 558.

in them, yet it is latent; for they bear corruption shut up in the soul, so that before God they are damnable.”—Ezekiel xviii., Opera iv. 167.¹ “When the Lord rejects the godless man, with his offspring, there is certainly no expostulation which we can make with God. . . . This, therefore, is to be held for certain, that all who are destitute of the grace of God are included under the sentence of eternal death; whence it follows that the children of the reprobate, whom the curse of God follows, are subject to the same sentence.”—On Isaiah xiv. 21.² “Calvin, in reply to Pighius, says: ‘If Pighius holds that original sin is not sufficient to damn men, and that the secret council of God is not to be admitted, what will he do with infant children, who, before they have reached an age at which they can give any such specimens . . . [as he demands], are snatched from this life. . . . For inasmuch as the conditions of birth and

¹ Krauth’s Infant Salvation, pp. 17, 18.

² God and Little Children, p. 21.

death were alike to infants who died in Sodom and those who died in Jerusalem: and there were no difference in their works: why will Christ, at the last day, separate some to stand at his right hand, others at his left?" Calvin assumes as granted, and as undisputed that the infants of Sodom were damned. He appeals to it as a known something to settle a contested point, and after the words we have cited goes on to say: 'Who will not adore this wonderful judgment of God whereby it comes to pass that some are born at Jerusalem, whence soon they pass to a better life, while Sodom, the gates of the lower regions, receives others at their birth?' "¹

"I inquire again, how it came to pass that the fall of Adam, independent of any remedy, should involve so many nations with their infant children in eternal death, but because such was the will of God. Their tongues, so loquacious on every other point, must here be struck dumb. It is an awful

¹ Krauth, p. 46.

decree, I confess; but no one can deny that God foreknew the future final fate of man before he created him, and that he did foreknow it because it was appointed by his own decree.”¹

In speaking of these words of Calvin, Dr. Schaff expresses himself as follows: “Our best feelings, which God himself has planted in our hearts, instinctively revolt against the thought that a God of infinite love and justice should create millions of immortal beings in his own image—probably more than half of the human race—in order to hurry them from the womb to the tomb, and from the tomb to everlasting doom! And this not for any actual sin of their own, but simply for the transgression of Adam of which they never heard, and which God himself not only permitted, but somehow foreordained. This, if true, would indeed be a ‘*decrelum horribile.*’ ”²

¹ Institutes, Book III., Chap. xxiii., Sec. 7.

² History of the Christian Church, Vol. III., p. 559.

In commenting on the same extract from the *Institutes*, Dr. H. J. Van Dyke says: "Now let us be candid with ourselves, and even with our opponents. Historic Calvinism *does* include what Calvin himself calls the *horribile decretum*, that by the election and predestination of God many nations, *with their infant children*, are irretrievably doomed to eternal death. The language above quoted cannot be interpreted as referring only to the guilt of Adam's first sin, by which judgment came upon all men to condemnation, because: (1) That is true of *all*, and not merely *of many* nations. (2) That guilt and condemnation is not *without remedy*; the remedy for it is the very essence and glory of the gospel of Christ. The Lamb of God 'taketh away *the sin* of the world.' (3) The judgment that has come upon all men to condemnation, so that 'all were in the person of one made *liable* to eternal death,' is not what Calvin singles out from the results of the covenant work, and tags as a *horrible decree*. His reasoning is the

other way. He assumes as a premise, which it is ‘impossible to deny,’ that God by his decree of predestination, and for no other reason than because it *seemed meet* to him to do so, has involved the *infant offspring* of many nations in eternal death *without remedy.*’ ”¹

“If any of those who are the objects of divine election, after having received the sign of regeneration, depart out of this life before they have attained years of discretion, the Lord renovates them by the power of his Spirit, incomprehensible to us, in such a manner as he alone foresees will be necessary.”² On the foregoing discussion of Calvin, of baptized infants, Dr. Fisher remarks that “nowhere in this prolonged discussion does Calvin say that *all* those *baptized* children of Christian parents who die in infancy are saved. ‘If any of those who are *objects of divine election*’ depart from life, after baptism, and before they attain to years of discretion, ‘the Lord renovates them

¹ The Variations of Calvinism, pp. 39, 40.

² Institutes, Book IV., Chap. xvi., Sec. 21.

by the power of his Spirit, incomprehensible to us, in such a manner as he alone foresees to be necessary.' Farther than this he does not go. Respecting infants who cannot repent and believe, as to the advantage of baptism in the case of such of them as are not of the elect, Calvin encountered a difficulty similar to that which Augustine failed to solve in dealing with the relation of the sacraments to predestination."¹

As has been indicated, Calvin appears to have confined election among those who die in infancy to "the infants of the *pious* (elect) parents." But from the last citation made to his writings, it is evident that Calvin did not even feel certain about the salvation of *all* those who die in infancy, of Christian parentage. If Calvin's writings teach anything, they most surely teach that *some who die in infancy are lost!*

Dr. C. P. Krauth writes that² "the whole

¹ History of Christian Doctrine, p. 306.

² Infant Baptism and Infant Salvation in the Calvinistic System, p. 52.

body of Genevan pastors, fifteen in number, with Calvin heading the list, charged upon Servetus as one of his errors—the errors which cost him his life—that he asserts that ‘he dare condemn none of the (infant) offspring of Ninevites or Barbarians to hell (*futurum gehennam*) because, in his opinion, a merciful Lord, who hath freely taken away the sins of the godless, would never so severely condemn those by whom no godless act has been committed, and who are most innocent images of God,’ and further he infers that ‘all who are taken from life as infants and children are exempt from eternal death, though they be elsewhere called accursed.’” *Refutatio Errorum Michaelis Serveti, Opera.*

The same author says:¹ “Calvin wrote with great bitterness against Castalio, who had been his friend, but who speedily showed the working of the tendencies which matured at a later period unto Arminianism: ‘You deny that it is lawful for God,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

except for misdeed, to condemn any human being. Nevertheless numberless infants are removed from life. Put forth now your virulence against God, who precipitates into eternal death harmless new-born children (*innoxios foetus*) torn from their mothers' bosoms. Your masters, Servetus, Pighius, and such like dogs (*similes canes*), say at least that before the world was created some were condemned whom God foreknew worthy of destruction. But you will not concede that he devotes to eternal death any except those who for perpetrated evil deeds would be exposed to penalty under earthly judges. . . . You do not hesitate to overturn the whole order of divine justice.'"

De Occulta Dei Providentia Opera.

The following citations from Krauth¹ show that Calvin's contemporaries shared his opinions, as expressed in the foregoing quotations. Calvin himself said that "God, by the secret grace of his Spirit, causes that they (sacraments) shall not be without ef-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

fect in the elect. To the reprobate they are merely dead and useless figures.

"Grynaeus.—'They who have been baptized with water only, not also with the Holy Spirit and fire, ought to be regarded as *not baptizèd*.'

"Musculus. — 'There are impediments which prohibit the grace of baptism from having place. They are of two kinds: one *secret*, the other open. The *secret* impediment is, if any one belong not to the number of the elect, but is of the reprobate, this *impediment* forever prevents participation of the grace of Christ. . . . In the Church of Christ it cannot be observed that only the elect should be baptized. It is as in the Old Testament, in which God himself so instituted the initial sacrament, as unwilling that in its administration a *discrimination* should be made by *human presumption* between the elect and the reprobate. Nay, he hath so *preserved to himself* the knowledge of this *discrimination* that he commanded the sacrament of his grace to be

administered to all *infants*, the *reprobate* as well as the elect, to Esau, whom he hated in his mother's womb, as well as to Jacob, whom he loved before he was born.'

"Zanchius.—In the Confession of the Church of Strasbourg, 1539, in Article XVIII., the preachers are admonished that they baptize no one, except this sentence be either *expressed* or *understood*: I baptize this person, O God, in accordance with thy election, and the purpose of thy will.' Hence, Zanchius, as quoted by the same author,¹ makes this affirmation: "We believe that *elect infants*, when they are baptized, are not baptized with water alone, but are endowed also with the spirit of regeneration." So outside of the *Institutes* evidence is not wanting to prove that Calvin believed that some infants dying in infancy are reprobated to eternal misery, and that many of his contemporaries believed the same doctrine.

Friedrich Spanheim (1632-1701) studied

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

theology and philosophy at Leyden, and was appointed professor of theology at Heidelberg in 1655, and at Leyden in 1670. "He wrote a defense of Calvin against Descartes and Cocceius." He is quoted by Dr. Warfield as saying:¹ "Confessedly, therefore, original sin is a most just cause of positive reprobation. Hence no one fails to see what we should think concerning the children of pagans dying in their childhood; for unless we acknowledge salvation outside of God's covenant and Church, . . . and suppose that all the children of the heathen dying in infancy are saved, and that it would be a great blessing to them if they should be smothered by the mid-wives or strangled in the cradle, we should humbly believe that they are justly reprobated by God on account of the corruption (*labes*) and guilt (*reatus*) derived to them by natural propagation. Hence, too, Paul testifies (Romans v. 14) that death has

¹Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation, p. 41.

passed upon them which have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, and distinguishes and separates (1 Corinthians vii. 14) the children of the covenanted as holy from the impure children of unbelievers."

VI.

The Synod of Dort.

The Synod of Dort was held in 1618-19. The causes leading to the convening of this synod are set forth by Dr. John Henry Kurtz as follows:¹ “Calvin’s dogma of absolute predestination (which even the German Reformed Church evaded, or softened down), produced in the Netherlands a passionate controversy, which ended in the split of the Netherland Reformed Church. In the 16th century, already, the milder view of the *infralapsarians*, who held that the act of predestination followed the fall, was set up in opposition to that of the stricter Calvinists, who maintained that God had passed that act, before the fall, and who were therefore called *supralapsarians*. Drawn into this controversy, James Arminius, professor in Leyden since 1603, became more and more convinced, that the

¹ Church History, Vol. II., pp. 210, 211.

dogma of an absolute predestination was anti-scriptural, but then wandered into Pelagian paths. His colleague, Francis Gomarus, violently opposed him. The conflict soon became so bitter and general that the Holland States supposed they would have to interfere. A religious colloquy proved the more fruitless, as Arminius died during its progress (1609). The States, favoring the Arminians, declared the differences non-essential, and enjoined peace. Simon Episcopius, from 1611 professor in Leyden, placed himself at the head of the Arminian party. But as the Arminians were continually reproached and assailed by the Gomarists as Pelagians, they laid a *Remonstrance* before the States (1610), which, in five articles, set forth a carefully restricted semi-pelagianism. Thenceforth they were called *Remonstrants*, their opponents *Contra-Remonstrants*. There were influential men on the side of the Arminians, including the syndic Oldenbarneveld, and Hugo Grotius, distinguished as a jurist,

humanist, and theologian,—heads of the liberal, republican party. The Stadtholter Maurice of Orange, on the other hand, took part with the Gomarists, in order by their influence to pave his way to the throne. By a master stroke he succeeded in overpowering the leaders of the opposing party. It was ordered that the religious controversy should be decided by a general Synod at Dort (1618-19). An invitation to attend was extended to theologians of all reformed countries, and twenty-eight foreigners were present. The result could be foreseen. The doctrine of the Remonstrants was rejected, absolute predestination was established anew as a doctrine of the Church, but the infralapsarian view was allowed.”

We are told¹ that “the synod was opened and closed with great solemnity, and held one hundred and fifty-four formal sessions, besides a larger number of conferences. The expenses were borne by the States General on a very liberal scale, and exceeded 100,000

¹ Schaff's Creeds of Christendom, Vol. I., p. 513.

guilders [\$40,000]. The sessions were public, and crowded by spectators. John Bogerman, pastor at Leuwarden, was elected president; Festus Hommius, pastor in Leyden, first secretary—both strict Calvinists. The former had translated Beza's tract on the punishment of heretics, into Dutch; the latter prepared a new Latin version of the Belgic Confession. The whole Dutch delegation was orthodox. Only three delegates from the provincial Synod of Utrecht were Remonstrants, but these had to yield their seats to the three orthodox members elected by the minority in that province. Gomarus represented supralapsarian Calvinism, but the great majority were infralapsarians or sublapsarians. Thus the fate of the Arminians was decided beforehand. Episcopius and his friends—thirteen in all—were summoned before the synod simply as defendants, and protested against unconditional submission. Orthodox Calvinism achieved a complete triumph. The five articles of the Remonstrance were unanimously rejected,

and five Calvinistic canons adopted, together with the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism."

The five articles of the Remonstrants which were condemned are as follows: "The first asserts conditional election, or election dependent on the foreknowledge of faith. The second asserts universal atonement, in the sense that it is intended, although it is not actually efficient, for all. The third affirms the inability of men to exercise saving faith, or to accomplish anything really good without regeneration through the Holy Spirit. The fourth declares that although grace at every step of the spiritual life is indispensable, it is yet not irresistible. The fifth pronounces the perseverance of all believers doubtful. Later, the Arminians went further on this last point, maintaining that believers may fall from grace finally."¹ Over against the foregoing the Synod of Dort "declared its judgment in opposition to the Arminians, on all the characteristic

¹ Fisher's History of Doctrine, p. 338.

points of their system, and put forth, by way of antithesis, what have been called the five points of high Calvinism: unconditional election; limited atonement (designed for the elect alone); the complete impotency of the fallen will; irresistible grace; and the perseverance of believers.”¹

Dr. Fisher observes² that “the Canons of Dort, both in spirit and letter, present Calvinism, not in its extreme, yet in its unadulterated form.” Dr. Hagenbach says:³ “Though the Synod of Dort hesitated to declare in favor of supralapsarianism, yet this was, at any rate, the inmost sense of orthodoxy.” While the synod did not adopt the strongest supralapsarian phraseology, yet it was very careful, in framing its symbols, not to give ground for offense to the supralapsarian element, which was certainly very strong. While Arminianism was unanimously condemned, it, nevertheless, exerted a power-

¹ Fisher’s History of the Reformation, p. 474.

² History of Doctrine, p. 339.

³ History of Doctrine, Vol. II., p. 274.

ful influence on the form of the confessional statement: “God, from most free, just, irreprehensible, and immutable, good pleasure, decreed to leave [the non-elect] in the common misery, into which they had, by their own fault, cast themselves, and not to bestow on them living faith, and the grace of conversion; but, having been left in their own ways, and under just judgment, at length, not only on account of their unbelief, but also of all their other sins, to condemn and eternally punish them to the manifestation of his own justice.”¹ Here we have what is called the doctrine of a *permissive* decree, on which Dr. Shedd remarks:² “If God could permissively decree the fall of Adam and his posterity without being the cause and author of it, he can also permissively decree the eternal death of an individual sinner without being the cause and author of it.”

¹ Articles of the Synod of Dort, I., 15.

² Proposed Revision of the Westminster Standards, p. 38.

There is no doubt that many of the members of the Synod of Dort were supralapsarians. "No synod," says Dr. B. B. Warfield,¹ "probably ever met which labored under greater temptation to declare that some infants, dying in infancy, are reprobated, than the Synod of Dort. Possibly nearly every member of it held as his private opinion that there are such infants." In this connection it will be interesting to note the opinions held by eminent divines, on this question, about the time and just after the meeting of this synod. Dr. Schaff writes:² "In the Synod of Dort (1619) the Calvinists, including the delegates of the Church of England, asserted in various shapes infant reprobation and infant damnation against the Arminians, who at first admitted a sort of negative hell for *some* infants (the *poena damni*, as distinct from

¹ Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation, p. 44.

² Creed Revision in the Presbyterian Churches, p. 19.

the *poena sensus*), but afterwards positively maintained the salvation of *all* infants dying in infancy."

Lubbert is quoted as saying:¹ "There is an election of infants, there is a reprobation of infants. . . . To the infants of the *Church* belong the promise. . . . To the others (infants), who are out of the *Church*, no promise is made." Dr. Krauth says that the three Belgic Professors, Polyander, Thyseus, and Walaeus, "attached their names as approvers." These three professors are credited with the statement that² "Infants born of *parents not in the covenant*, the Scripture pronounces impure and aliens from the covenant of grace."

Gomarus said:³ "On account of original sin alone, there is also damnation, which is the wages of every sin, even of sin which is not actual. Therefore, also the infants unregenerate, the **infants of unbelievers**,

¹ Krauth, p. 35.

² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

who are aliens from the covenant of God, are by nature children of wrath, without Christ, without *hope*, without God, as also the infants of the world of the ungodly in the flood, and the infants of the impious Sodomites in the burning, perished, and were justly subjected to the wrath of God with their parents."

"Nor is it to be doubted," says Marckius,¹ "that among these *reprobated* are to be referred . . . the *infants of unbelievers*. For though of *individual persons* . . . of infants born of unbelievers, we cannot and do not wish particularly to determine, because of God's liberty, and the often secret ways of his Spirit, yet all these are by nature children of wrath, impure, alien, and remote from God, without hope, and left to themselves. God has revealed nothing as decreed or to be done for their salvation, and they are destitute of the ordinary means of grace. So that we ought *utterly to reject not only their salvation*, of which Pelagians dream, but

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

also the remonstrant (Arminian) theory that *their penalty is one of privation, without sensation.* The terminus to which these are predestined is *eternal death, destruction, damnation.* Hence it is fitting to style this the end or terminus, alike of the reprobation and of the creation in time, of the reprobate."

Witsius is quoted by Dr. Krauth, as follows:¹ "Baptism does not signify nor seal, still less does it confer on *all* infants of those who are in the covenant, any common justification, regeneration and sanctification, . . . or remission of original sin, either a revocable or irrevocable remission. But all efficacy of baptism, which involves a state of salvation, even in respect of *their age*, is confined to *elect infants* alone (*solis electis infantibus proprium*)."

The same author credits Leydecker with the following statement:² "The faith demanded of parents in the formula of bap-

¹ P. 27.

² P. 27.

tism is *indefinite*: This, to wit that godly persons' infants are *sanctified* in Christ. And that faith is true, although there should be here and there *an exception*. . . . That divine promise has a *common* truth, though God *reserve to himself*, according to his own power and liberty, *the exclusion of some infants*. Faith . . . performs its office when it lays hold of the promise *as it is given*, and reverently leaves to God *liberty of application*. The believer is bound . . . to acquiesce in the promise given . . . and to trust in it, or, in the judgment of charity, to hope well concerning this infant which is to be baptized—nay, to believe that *this infant* belongs to Christ, *unless* God, by a singular decision, *wills its exclusion*. The faith demanded of parents is not vain . . . though *here and there one* (of the infants) *does not belong to the election* . . . although there is not an internal baptizing of exactly *all infants*."

However little or much the Synod of Dort toned down the supralapsarianism of the

times, it is, nevertheless, evident that the Canons of Dort present Calvinism in its unadulterated form, and that the majority, at least, of the Church was satisfied with that statement. Those who held to supralapsarianism, and they were not a few, had no difficulty in subscribing to these Canons. It is perfectly clear that some, after the adoption of these Canons, as before, held that some infants dying in infancy are lost.

VII.

The Westminster Assembly.

In order to understand the circumstances under which the Westminster Assembly was convened, it is necessary to inquire something about the reign and policy of Charles I., of England. He was the son of James I., and succeeded his father to the throne, and reigned from 1625 to 1649. He became involved in a controversy with Parliament, which amounted, in substance, to a question of sovereignty. Between 1625 and 1629 three Parliaments were convened, and, because disobedient to his behests, were disbanded. For about eleven years he called no Parliament, and “England was ruled as despotically as France.” In the meantime, at the instigation of Archbishop William Laud, Charles undertook to force episcopacy upon Scotland, contrary to the fundamental law of the kingdom. This led Scotland to rise in arms against England, and with such

a degree of success that Charles called a Parliament, which convened in April, 1640, but after twenty days, the king, seeing that he could not control it, dissolved it. This is known in history as “the Short Parliament.” But Charles found himself in such straits that he was compelled to call another Parliament, in November, 1640. “This Parliament punished the king’s tools, and forced him to admit that it should not be dissolved without its own consent. It then proceeded to divest the king of much of his power.” This became famous in history as “the Long Parliament.” The controversy between the king and Parliament led to the great civil war, which began in 1642.

But the Scotch were not the only people who were antagonized by the king’s policy. Professor Fisher says¹ that Laud “was a martinet in all matters of ritual. He attached an immense importance to externals in religion, and to uniformity in the ceremonies of worship. By such means he be-

¹ History of the Christian Church, p. 402.

lieved that inward piety was best promoted. Joined with this fixed idea was a sacerdotal theory of apostolic succession, which tended to carry him farther away from the other Protestant Churches than from the Church of Rome." The Puritans were persecuted at home, and the Roman Catholics sympathized with abroad. Thus the people saw what they believed to be a tendency toward "High-Churchism," if not toward Roman Catholicism.

It was under influences of this character that the Westminster Assembly was convened. "The first bill of Parliament to that effect was conceived in a spirit hostile to the Episcopal hierarchy, but rather friendly to the ancient liturgy, and was passed October 15, 1642, but failed for the want of royal assent. As the king's concurrence became hopeless, Parliament issued on its own responsibility an ordinance, June 12, 1643, commanding that an Assembly of divines should be convened at Westminster, in London, on the first day of July following, to

effect a more perfect reformation of the Church of England in its liturgy, discipline and government, on the basis of the Word of God, and thus to bring it into nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland, and the Reformed Churches on the Continent. Presbyterianism was not mentioned, but pretty plainly pointed at.”¹ It was the purpose of Parliament that all the leading parties in the English Church should be represented, except that of Laud, “whose exclusive High-Churchism and despotism had been the chief cause of the troubles in Church and State, and made co-operation impossible.” The members of the Assembly fall into four groups, namely, Episcopilians, Presbyterians, Independents, and Erastians. “The Presbyterians formed the great majority and gained strength as the Assembly advanced.”

In accordance with this purpose, the Assembly undertook to revise the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. Dr.

¹ Schaff in *Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. I., p. 730.

Schaff writes¹ that “the Assembly was at first employed for ten weeks on a revision of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, being directed by an order of Parliament (July 5, 1643) ‘to free and vindicate the doctrine of them from all aspersions and false interpretations.’ The Puritans regarded the doctrinal Articles as sound and orthodox in substance and spirit, but capable of improvement in the line marked out by the Lambeth Articles and the Irish Articles; in other words, they desired to make them more explicitly Calvinistic. Fifteen of these Articles, including the most important doctrines, were thus revised, and provided with Scripture proofs.”

The same writer affirms² that “the work of revision was suspended by an order of Parliament, October 12, 1643, requiring the Assembly to enter upon the work of Church government, and then given up in consequence of an order ‘to frame a Confession

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 754.

² *Ibid.*, p. 755.

of Faith for the three kingdoms, according to the Solemn League and Covenant.' The framing of the Westminster Confession is therefore due to Scotch influence and the adoption of the Solemn League and Covenant." In another place¹ Dr. Schaff gives the following very interesting account of the formation and adoption of the Solemn League and Covenant: "The immediate origin of this international politico-religious Covenant was the combined application of the English Parliament, then at war with King Charles I., and the Westminster Assembly of Divines, then sitting under its authority, for the effectual aid of the Scots, who occupied a position of neutrality. Six commissioners—four from the Parliament (Sir William Armyn, Sir Harry Vane the younger, Mr. Hatcher, and Mr. Darley) and two from the Westminster Assembly (Stephen Marshall and Philip Nye)—appeared with official and private letters before the Scotch Convention of Estates and

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 691, 692.

the General Assembly at Edinburgh, in August, 1643. The English desired a civil league; the Scotch were for a religious covenant, and made the latter a condition of the former. Alexander Henderson, a highly esteemed minister at Edinburgh, Rector of the University (since 1640), and then for the third time Moderator of the General Assembly, was intrusted with the preparation of the document. He had drawn up a part of the National Covenant five years before. The English suggested some modifications which gave greater prominence to the political feature. The draft was unanimously and enthusiastically adopted by the General Assembly and the Scottish Convention, August 17, 1643. The people, who had not forgotten the Covenant of 1638, manifested their most hearty approval.” After the adoption of the Solemn League and Covenant, Scotland sent commissioners to sit in the Westminster Assembly. Bishop J. F. Hurst says:¹ “As an Assembly for the state-

¹ Short History of the Christian Church, p. 296.

ment of Christian doctrine, the Westminster divines performed acts which have had, ever since, a most important bearing on the whole subsequent history of the Church."

Having considered the formation of the Westminster Assembly, together with the conditions which called it into existence, it will next be in place to inquire into the doctrinal position of the Assembly. Dr. Schaff says:¹ "As to doctrine, there was no serious difference among the members. They all held the Calvinistic system with more or less rigor. There were no Arminians, Pelagians, or Antinomians among them." Professor Fisher adds:² "It has never been doubted that the Westminster Confession is Calvinistic." It appears that the predilections of the framers of the Confession were of a strong Augustinian type. Dr. Alexander F. Mitchell says:³ "There was, perhaps, no branch of the Mediæval

¹ *Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. I., p. 732.

² *History of Christian Doctrine*, p. 359.

³ *The Westminster Assembly*, pp. 336, 337.

Church where the system of doctrine developed by Augustine had so unquestionably retained its old supremacy to the last as the Anglo-Norman. The system of its greatest theologians, Anselm and Bradwardine, appropriated by Wyclif and the Lollards, continued or revived by Tyndale, Frith, Barnes, and their coadjutors, may be said to have formed the substratum of the Reformed teaching, even while it was least affected by influences from abroad. Such influences, however, were early brought to bear on that teaching, and it has long seemed to me that the effect of these upon it, and their ready assimilation, were largely due to the hold Augustinianism had already gained; that it was through the teaching of Anselm, Bradwardine, Wyclif and Tyndale, rather than from 'fascination of the calm, clear intellect of Calvin,' they were first attracted toward him and the later predestinarian school. With the full sanction of Cranmer and the Privy Council of Edward VI., Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr were

in 1548 invited to England, and soon after their arrival were installed as professors or lecturers in divinity in the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, to imbue with the theology of the Reformation the future ministers of the English Church. Their published commentaries on the Ephesians and the Romans embody the substance of the lectures they delivered in the years 1550 and 1551, and show clearly that their teaching on predestination and other related subjects was in thorough accordance with that of Augustine and Anselm, as well as with that of Calvin." In reference to the makeup of the Westminster Assembly, Dr. Mitchell says: "It was meant to be as comprehensive as the accepted theology of the Reformation would at all permit, as tolerant as the times would yet bear." It, therefore, appears that the substratum of the theology of the Britons, at the time the Assembly met, was of the hyper-Calvinistic type. But even then, though not to the same extent as now, there were "variations of Calvinism."

These “variations of Calvinism” to some degree manifested themselves in the Westminster Assembly.

Dr. Schaff affirms¹ that “it is an important fact, which deserves careful consideration in the present discussion, that there was no unanimity in the Westminster Assembly on these hard doctrines or ‘knotty points’ of Calvinism. This is evident from the minutes of the Assembly published by Professor Alexander F. Mitchell, of St. Andrew’s, from the London manuscript, in 1874, and from the private writings of several of the leading Westminster divines, quoted in his valuable introduction.” An examination of the volume named by Dr. Schaff will satisfy any one that the members of the Westminster Assembly were by no means a unit in their doctrinal opinions. Now while “it has never been doubted that the Westminster Confession is Calvinistic,” yet it is in place to inquire to what degree it is Calvinistic. Is it a supralapsarian, or an infra- or sublapsa-

¹ Creed Revision, p. 15.

rian confession? Scholars generally unite in calling it a confession of the latter type.

In 1615 the Irish Articles were adopted "in the Convocation holden at Dublin." As has already been noted, the Synod of Dort was held in 1618-19. Which Articles does the Westminster Confession follow the more closely, those of Dort or Dublin? Whatever influence those of Dort may have had on the Assembly, the resemblance between the Irish Articles and the Westminster Confession is too striking to leave any doubt that the Westminster divines had the latter clearly in mind, so far as the form of expression is concerned. The following parallel on "God's Eternal Decree" illustrates the striking similarity of the two confessions:

WESTMINSTER CONFESsION.
1647.

Chap. III.—1. God, from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.

4. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

IRISH ARTICLES.
1615.

11. God, from all eternity, did, by his unchangeable counsel, ordain whatsoever in time should come to pass: yet so as thereby no violence is offered to the wills of the reasonable creatures, and neither the liberty nor the contingency of the second causes is taken away, but established rather.

12. By the same eternal counsel God hath predestinated some unto life, and reprobated some unto death: of both which there is a certain number known only to God, which can neither be increased nor diminished.

The Irish Articles “are a clear and succinct system of divinity, in full harmony with Calvinism. . . . They teach absolute predestination.” It will be observed that “reprobated” in Article 12 of the Irish Articles becomes “foreordained” in Chapter III., Section 3, of the Westminster Confession. The Minutes of the Westminster Assembly show that the 528th session was

given to a “debate about leaving out those words, ‘foreordained to everlasting death.’” But for some reason these words were retained. There can be no doubt that some of the members of the Westminster Assembly were supralapsarians, and that some were infra- or sublapsarians. Dr. Thomas Ridgeley (1667-1734) said: “The decree of God, respecting intelligent creatures, is to be considered as consisting of two branches, election and reprobation.” Dr. Charles Hodge holds that the symbols of the Westminster Assembly were so framed “as to avoid offense to those who adopted the supralapsarian theory.” Dr. Schaff thinks that “the Westminster Confession may be called a compromise” between the “milder and stricter” schools of Calvinism. The most that can be claimed for the Westminster Confession of Faith, then, is that it is a compromise. If it is not a supralapsarian confession, neither can it be unqualifiedly called a **sublapsarian** confession. Dr. Henry

J. Van Dyke affirms that¹ "the third section has a *supralapsarian* bias. It may be construed to mean that men are foreordained, whether to life or death, simply as men, and not as *fallen* men; in other words, that God makes one on purpose to save him, and another on purpose to damn him." Again he says:² "If it was designed to embrace both the supralapsarian and the sublapsarian form of Calvinism, it failed in its object; for it leans distinctly toward the theory that God foreordains men to eternal death simply as creatures, antecedent to and irrespective of their sins. For one, I do not believe this; neither do I subscribe to it. I receive and adopt the confession as a whole, *in spite* of this statement. Ninety-nine hundredths of our Presbyterian ministers do the same."

The Westminster Confession, says Dr. Schaff,³ "limits redemption to the elect (the

¹Ought the Confession of Faith to be Revised?
p. 10.

²Ibid., p. 21.

³Creed Revision, p. 17.

term ‘atonement’ does not occur in the Confession), and plainly excludes the doctrine of a universal redemption in ch. III. 6 (‘they who are *elected* are redeemed by Christ’), in ch. viii. 8 (‘to all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually *apply* and *communicate* the same’), and in ch. vii. 3 (‘promising to give unto all those that are *ordained unto life* his Holy Spirit’). Some Presbyterian divines have tried to harmonize the document with the doctrine of universal atonement, but the natural meaning and intent of the language excludes the non-elect.” Again,¹ “According to the Confession, then, Christ is not the Savior of the world or of mankind, but the Savior of the elect only. . . . The Confession, moreover, teaches, together with a decree of election, also a decree of reprobation, or an eternal foreordination of ‘some men and angels to everlasting death’ (ch. iii. 3, ‘for their sins’ being omitted), and declares that God was pleased ‘*to pass by* the rest

* *Ibid.*, p. 20.

of mankind [the non-elect] and to *ordain* them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice' (ch. iii. 7). This decree of reprobation and preterition must include all Gentiles, Jews and Mohammedans, who constitute more than two-thirds of the human race; for they are expressly excluded from salvation in ch. x. 4. Such a decree is truly a *decretum horribile*, as Calvin himself called it, although he reluctantly accepted it as true (*attamen verum*) in obedience to his logic and a false interpretation of the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, which can be properly understood only in connection with the tenth and eleventh chapters, and the theme (i. 16)."

Dr. C. H. Parkhurst, a prominent Presbyterian minister of New York City, in writing in favor of the revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which was under consideration in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, in 1892-3, said:¹ "God does his utmost to save every

¹ How Shall We Revise? p. 91.

body; that is our [revisionists] position. God does his utmost to save a part and passes by the rest; that is the other position. That last, according to what seems to us the only fair mode of interpretation, is the doctrine of our [Westminster] Confession of Faith."

Dr. George L. Prentiss refers to "the numerous catechisms, which prepared the way, and served, more or less, as a basis for those of Westminster," and quotes from one entitled "Guide unto true Blessedness" by Samuel Crooke (2d Ed., 1614), as follows:¹

Q. How doth God deal with reprobates, dying infants? A. Being once conceived, they are in the state of death by reason of the sin of Adam imputed and of original corruption, wherein also dying, they perish; as (for instance) the children of heathen parents; touching the children of Christians, we are taught to account them *holy*."

"The effect of such discussions as these,"

¹Presbyterian Review, Vol. IV., p. 553.

says Dr. Prentiss,¹ "is plainly visible in the carefully guarded statements of the Westminster divines. I will cite three bearing directly upon our subject. The first is found in the Confession of Faith, chap. x. 3: 'Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth.'

"The others are found in the Confession of Faith, chap. xxviii., secs. 5. 6: 'Although it be a great sin to neglect this ordinance [i. e., baptism], yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.'

"The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time when it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether

² *Ibid.*, pp. 553, 554.

of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.'

"These and corresponding statements of the Westminster standards molded opinion in the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches, both of Great Britain and this country, for the next 150 years. In the Established Church of England—at least in the case of the so-called 'High-Church' members—among the Lutherans at home and in the German dispersion, and wherever the symbols of the Synod of Dort bore sway, baptism continued to be widely regarded as, ordinarily, a necessary condition of salvation. It is still so regarded by those who adhere firmly to the old churchly doctrine of baptismal regeneration."

The teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith on the doctrine of election, as set forth in the foregoing pages, prepares the way for the statement found in chapter x., section 3, which reads as follows: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated

and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth." The minutes of the Westminster Assembly show that the 534th session was devoted to the "*debate about elect of infants.*" Referring to this debate, Dr. Briggs says:¹ "Inasmuch as there is no report of the debate and no indication of points of difference, such as we find in the minutes when important differences were developed, the debate was doubtless upon the mode of expression. The phrase seems not to have been changed by vote of the Assembly, for there is no record of such a vote. It was probably changed as a matter of style either by the committee that had charge of the 'wording of the Confession of Faith,' or by Dr. Cornelius Burgess, who had charge of the final transcription of the Confession before it was taken up to Parliament." Again,² "Dr. Burges, through whose hands the Confession went in its final transcription, was

¹ Whither? p. 123.

² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

the author of the book entitled ‘Baptismal Regeneration of Elect Infants,’ Oxford, 1629. There can be no doubt of his use of the term ‘Elect Infants.’¹ It is altogether likely that in the final transcription of the Confession, he made the change from ‘elect of infants’ to ‘elect infants’ as meaning the same thing.” After pointing out the fact that three (all whose opinions are known on this subject) of the persons above mentioned believed that some infants are not saved, he adds:² “It is evident that the change from ‘elect of infants’ to ‘elect infants’ was not occasioned by any differences of opinion as to the salvation of infants in these committees as distinguished from the grand committee.” Dr. A. F. Mitchell thinks that the phrase “elect of infants” “might have been susceptible” of the interpretation that there are “non-elect infants dying in infancy.”³ He believes, however, that the phrases “elect infants” and “elect of in-

¹ See pp. 105–107, of this book.

² Whither, p. 125.

³ The Westminster Assembly, p. 408.

fants" are susceptible of different interpretations. But the historical proofs adduced are conclusive that the two phrases were used in a synonymous sense. Then, so far as this debate throws any light on this subject, it seems to favor the idea that the Assembly meant to teach that some infants are not saved; at any rate it did not affirm the salvation of all infants who die in infancy.

Dr. E. D. Morris is of the opinion that the phrase, "elect infants," as used by the Westminster divines, meant "the infants of believers." He says:¹ "Following shortly after this comes the more positive statement of the Westminster Confession (x. 3), which directly affirms that elect infants (elect of infants: Minutes, 162) or the infants of believers, as was quite certainly meant, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit. This was unquestionably a notable advance on the statement of Dort and on all antecedent symbolism, indicating in

¹Theology of the Westminster Symbols, pp. 281, 282.

fact the highest point which the Protestantism of the seventeenth century reached, in respect to the problem of the salvability of children dying in infancy, while yet under the shadow and taint of the universal *pravity*." According to Dr. Morris' interpretation of the words, "elect infants," all the infants dying in infancy, except those of believers, are doomed to eternal woe. In the following chapter it will be seen that there was some doubt as to whether all infants of believers, dying in infancy were saved. There was no definite way of knowing who the elect among infants were.

The following quotation from Dr. Schaff, the eminent Presbyterian scholar, is worth a close reading:¹ "The term '*elect* infants,' in ch. x. 3, plainly implies, in the Calvinistic system, '*non-elect*' or '*reprobate* infants.' If the Confession meant to teach the salvation of *all* infants dying in infancy, as held by Dr. Hodge and nearly all the Presbyterian divines in America, it would have either said

¹ Creed Revision, pp. 17, 18.

'all infants,' or simply 'infants.' To explain 'elect' to mean 'all,' is not only ungrammatical and illogical, but fatal to the whole system of a limited election, and would make it universal. If *elect infants* is equivalent to *all infants*, then *elect adults* would be equivalent to *all adults*.

"This unnatural interpretation is also unhistorical and contradicts the expressed opinions of the scholastic Calvinists who regarded the eternal damnation of reprobate infants an essential part of the manifestation of the glorious majesty and justice (!) of God. Zwingli was the only one among the Reformers who boldly broke through the tradition of centuries and ventured to express the belief or strong hope of the salvation of all infants dying in infancy, and of all the noble heathen who honestly and earnestly strove after righteousness. Luther doubted whether Zwingli could be a Christian at all with such sentiments. Melanchthon, in the Augsburg Confession, condemns the doctrine that infants can be saved with-

out baptism. Calvin did not shrink from what he himself confesses to be a ‘terrible’ or ‘awful decree,’ that ‘the fall of Adam, independently of any remedy, should involve the eternal death of so many nations, *with their infant offspring*,’ and he can only answer, ‘such was the will of God.’ In another place he says: ‘It is quite clear that infants who are to be saved—as certainly *some* of that age are saved—must before be regenerated by the Lord.’ This is precisely the doctrine of the Westminster Confession.

“The Continental Calvinists, with few exceptions, followed the great Geneva Reformer in confining salvation to elect infants after previous regeneration, whether baptized or not, and in excluding non-elect infants, whether baptized or not. . . . In the Synod of Dort (1619) the Calvinists, including the delegates of the Church of England, asserted in various shapes infant reprobation and infant damnation against the Arminians, who at first admitted a sort of negative hell for *some* infants. . . .

What else can we expect from the Westminster divines, the severest among the Calvinists? They are on record for the same awful opinion.” Dr. Charles L. Thompson, moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, in 1888, in writing about the Westminster Confession of Faith, said:¹ “There is a good deal of disbelief of the plain and historic meaning of some of the passages. For example, there is no quarrel about divine sovereignty, general or in election. But when that sovereignty is pushed into the philosophic inferences of the third chapter, in which the Confession goes on to give the reasons in God’s mind for his sovereignty in election, then there is a pretty wide dissent. So also ‘elect infants.’ The best that can be said about that phrase is that it needs a commentary wherever it goes. The worst that can be said about it is that, historically considered, it states clearly enough the minds of many, perhaps

¹ How Shall We Revise? pp. 184, 185.

a majority, of the Westminster Assembly; that they used the phrase intelligently, that they were not playing Delphic oracle with posterity,—they said ‘elect infants’ because they believed some infants dying in infancy were not elect and were not saved.”

Dr. Henry J. Van Dyke affirms¹ that the phrase “elect infants” “is quoted and understood by thousands within and without the Presbyterian Church, not only as tolerating, but as teaching by implication that some dying infants are lost, in fulfillment of a supralapsarian decree.”

“These doctrines” [including that of *elect* infants], says Dr. Schaff,² “are no longer believed by the majority of Presbyterians, nor preached by any Presbyterian minister, as far as I know. They certainly could not be preached in any pulpit without emptying the pews.” Dr. Cuyler, an experienced Presbyterian pastor, “goes much farther, and asserts that ‘ninety-nine hun-

¹ Ought the Confession to be Revised? p. 22.

² Creed Revision, p. 48.

dredths' do not believe these features of the Westminster Confession.”¹ “When Dr. Schaff read his more moderate statement in [the New York] Presbytery, he asked the brethren present to contradict his assertion by rising, if any of them ever preached on the decree of reprobation and preterition; but no one rose. Silence gives consent.”

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.



VIII.

Opinions of Some Westminster Divines.

Dr. Warfield says¹ that “what has been said of the Synod of Dort (see page 55 of this work) may be repeated of the Westminster Assembly. The Westminster divines were generally at one in the matter of infant salvation with the doctors of Dort.” Dr. Shedd concedes² “that many of the elder Calvinists believed that there are some non-elect infants is undeniable.” And again, that there were those in the Westminster Assembly who held “that dying infants are elected as individuals, some being elect, and some non-elect.”

¹ Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation, p. 46.

² Proposed Revision of the Westminster Standards, pp. 69, 6.

Dr. Van Dyke declares¹ that “there is no doubt that this [supralapsarian] theory was held by many in the Westminster Assembly.”

Dr. George L. Prentiss says:² “If a single one of the Westminster divines believed that all who die in infancy are elect and consequently saved, he never, so far as is known, avowed such belief. There were, no doubt, differences of opinion in the Assembly as to the precise terms and means of infant salvation; but I find no record of any difference of opinion as to its being limited.”

“In the seventeenth century,” says Dr. Briggs,³ “orthodox theologians, so far as I have been able to determine, were unanimous in the opinion that the heathen and their infants were doomed to everlasting fire. The Baptists pressed the doctrine of the salvation of their unbaptized children as

¹Ought the Confession to be Revised? p. 69.

²Presbyterian Review, Vol. IV., p. 554.

³How Shall We Revise? p. 99.

the children of believers; but they did not teach the salvation of the heathen and their babes. It was first the Unitarians, then the Latitudinarians of the Church of England, and finally the so-called Quakers, or Friends, as they call themselves, who are entitled to the credit of opening up the doctrine of the universal salvation of children and the partial salvation of the heathen. This was made possible by the great stress they laid upon the light of nature, and ‘the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.’” Confessional statements are usually the results of compromises. These compromises are made necessary because of the different personal opinions of the members composing the bodies framing the confessional statements. The Westminster Assembly was no exception to this rule. In determining how liberal “the compromise” was on this occasion, it is necessary to understand the strength of the supralapsarian sentiment, which was not offended by the statements on “decrees,” and “elect infants.”

Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose that an Assembly of “orthodox theologians,” who “were unanimous in the opinion that the heathen and their infants were doomed to everlasting fire,” and in which there was no “difference of opinion as to infant salvation’s being limited,” would frame a confession according to their own deep convictions; and that they really did do so will appear more evident in the light of the following quotations from the writings of certain prominent members of the Westminster Assembly.

Dr. William Twisse, the prolocutor, or moderator, of the Assembly was very pronounced in his views that many children who die in infancy are lost. Dr. Schaff writes¹ that Dr. Twisse “was a pronounced advocate of supralapsarianism, which makes God’s almighty and sovereign will the effective cause of Adam’s fall for the purpose of revealing both his terrible justice on the lost and his free grace on the redeemed.”

¹Creed Revision, p. 15.

Dr. Briggs quotes Dr. Twisse as follows:¹ "If many thousands, even all the infants of Turks and Sarazens dying in original sinne, are tormented by him in hell fire, is he to be accounted the father of cruelties for this? And I professe I cannot devise a greater shew and appearance of cruelty, than in this. Now I beseech you consider the spirit that breatheth in this man [Heard against whom he is here writing]; dares he censure God, as a Father of cruelties for executing eternall death upon them that are guilty of it?" Dr. Henry Van Dyke credits Dr. Twisse with the following:² "Many infants depart from this life in original sin, and consequently are condemned to eternal death on account of original sin alone; therefore from the sole transgression of Adam condemnation to eternal death has followed upon many infants."

"One of the most influential divines in the Westminster Assembly was Stephen

¹ Whither? pp. 125, 126.

² God and Little Children, pp. 22, 23.

Marshall, the great preacher of the civil wars. Marshall preached a ‘Sermon on the Baptizing of Infants’ in Westminster Abbey at a morning lecture in 1645.” In this sermon he makes the following objection against the views of those who reject infant baptism:¹ “This opinion puts all infants of *all believers* into the self same condition with the infants of *Turks* and *Indians*, which they will readily acknowledge; and from thence, unavoidably, one of three things must follow: 1. Either all of them are damned who die in their infancy, being without the Covenant of Grace, having no part in Christ. Or, 2. All of them saved, as having no originall sinne, and consequently needing no Saviour; which most of the Anabaptists in the world doe own, and therefore bring in all *Pelagianism, universal grace, free-will*, etc. Or, 3. That although they be tainted with originall corruption, and so need a Saviour, Christ doth, *pro benefacito*, save *some* of the infants of *In-*

*Quoted in the Presbyterian Review, July, 1883.

dians and Turks, dying in their infancy, as well as *some* of the infants of Christians, and so carry salvation by Christ out of the Church, beyond the Covenant of Grace, where God never made any promise. That God hath made a promise to be the God of *believers*, and of *their seed*, we all know; but where the promise is to be found, that he will be the God of the seed of such parents who live and die his enemies, and their seed, not so much as called by the preaching of the gospel, I know not. These men say the Covenant of Grace made to the *Jews* differs from the Covenant made with *us*; but I desire to know whether in the *one*, or in the *other*, they find any promise of salvation by Christ to any infants dying in their infancy, whose parents no way belonged to the family of God, or Covenant of Grace."

Dr. Cornelius Burgess was another prominent member of the Westminster Assembly. In 1629 he issued a treatise on "Baptismal Regeneration of Elect Infants." In this

work he says:¹ “It is most agreeable to the institution of Christ that all elect infants that are baptized (unless in some extraordinary cases) do, ordinarily, receive from Christ the Spirit in baptism, for their first solemne initiation into Christ, and for their future actual renovation, in God’s good time, if they live to years of discretion, and enjoy the ordinary means of grace appointed of God to this end.” He quotes the following extract from Dr. Thomas Taylor’s “Commentary on Titus,” giving it his full approval:² “Let us first *distinguish* of *infants*; of whom some be elected, and some belong not to the election of grace. These latter receive only the outward element, and are not inwardly washed: the former receive, in the right use of the sacrament, the *inward grace*; not that hereby we ty the maiesty of God to any time or meanes, whose spirit bloweth when and where he listeth; on some before baptisme, who are sanctified

¹ Schaff-Herzog, p. 341.

² Whither? p. 125.

from the womb; on some after: but because the *Lord delighteth to present himselfe gracious in his owne ordinance*; we may conceive that in the right use of this sacrament, *he ordinarily accompanieth it with his grace*: here, according to his promise, we may expect it, and here we may and ought send out the prayer of faith for it."

Anthony Burgess was also a member of the Westminster Assembly. The following quotation from his writings will show what his opinion was on the subject under discussion:¹ "We must necessarily make a distinction between such as are born under the Covenant, and such whose parents and their seed are strangers from it, and therefore with the *Remonstrants* to conclude, That all Infants, though born of Pagans, are surely saved, is to put no difference between being in the Covenant of Grace, and to be without, which yet the Scripture doth; Certainly if faith of the children of unbelievers, that they are unclean, 1 Cor. vii.,

¹ A Treatise of Original Sin, pp. 548, 549.

and Heathens they are said to be without; and therefore according to the Rule of the Scripture, we see no more visible way for the children of Heathens than for Heathens themselves to be saved; but yet the Orthodox do adde, that they leave these things to the judgement of God, and content themselves with that which *Paul saith*, 1 Cor. v. 12. *What have I to do to judge those that are without*: although the Apostle doth not there speak of a Doctrinal Judgement, but a Judgment of Jurisdiction, which Church Officers cannot exercise upon those that are without the Church, though this be so, we must always remember to put a difference between that general love of God to mankind, and that special grace of his to his Church, and therefore we must needs be injurious to this grace of God, if we make children without the Covenant to be partakers of the same special privilege which others within do receive; then the Gospel is no such extraordinary mercy, then the **Covenant of Grace** is no such signal favour,

then believing parents have no such cause to bless God for his merciful dispensations towards them, if Heathens' children are in as prepared a way for reconciliation with God, as their posterity is.

"Therefore the fountain and spring head of the salvation of children dying in their Infancy is the election of God as well as in grown persons, it holdeth in them, as well as in adult persons, that election doth obtain, *and he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy*, election and reprobation are among Infants dying so, as well as those that are men. Though this Doctrine be rejected by Arminians, yet believing parents who lose their children while in the blossom, are greatly to comfort their souls concerning their children so early deceased; for although they are not able to look into the Book of Life which is in heaven, and thereby know which child's name is written there, and which not; yet in that they are externally brought under the Covenant of Grace, and so in proxime capacity to Church-Commun-

ion; they may well satisfy themselves in this, as an effect of their election, and that because God hath chosen them to eternal glory, therefore are they in time received into this grace and favour, as to be of the reputed members of Christ, and in this we must rest, not doubting but that God doth internally go along with the Ordinance; and that if the child be taken away in its Infancy, it is done both in mercy to the child, and to the parents."

William Carter, who was a member of the Westminster Assembly, was a leading preacher among the Independents, who agreed with the Presbyterians in the doctrines of "divine decrees," and "elect infants." Dr. Briggs quotes him as follows:¹ "Therefore I say, this is one thing which makes this difference between the children of beleevers, and unbelievevers, that they are holy, and these common or unclean, because they are under such a word of blessing which these are not; yea though we cannot

¹ Whither? pp. 128, 129.

with certainty affirm of this or that infant of a beleever that it is inherently holy, yet holy as thus separated and differenced, from those who are common, by that word of blessing from God, under which they are. As we cannot upon certainty affirm of any particular person in the Church that he is inherently holy, because he may make a lye in his confession, yet of every such person we can say he is in that sense holy, namely, as separated unto God in that relation, and thereby differenced from those who are common or unclean."

In 1652 Nathaniel Culverwell published a book entitled "Light of Nature," "in which he advocated the salvation of some of the heathen." To this Anthony Tuckney, a member of the Westminster Assembly, replied. The following "essential points of the reply" are reproduced from "How Shall We Revise?"¹ "1. It cannot rationally be said, that there was an equall invincibility of ignorance in those *heathens*, to that which

¹Pp. 100, 101.

is in *infants* and *distracted persons*, which want the use of reason, which they had; and therefore might have made more use of it than they did; and therefore their sin was more wilful, and so made them more obnoxious to *God's wrath*, which therefore these *infants*, etc., as less guilty, may in reason better escape. 2. How God worketh in, or dealeth with elect infants which dye in their infancy (for any thing that I have found) the *Scripture* speaks not so much, or so evidently, as for me (or it may be for any) to make any clear or firm determination of it. But yet so much as that we have thence ground to believe, that they being in the covenant, they have the benefit of it, Acts iii. 25; Gen. xvii. 7. Whether God may not work and act faith in them (as he made John Baptist leap in the womb), which Beza, and others of our divines deny, and others are not unwilling to grant, I dare not peremptorily determine. Yet this I may say, that he acteth in the souls of believers *in articulo mortis*, when some of

them are as little able to put forth an act of reason as they were *in articulo nativitatis*. But the Scripture (for any thing that I know) speaks not of this and therefore I forbear to speak any thing of it. Only (as I said) it giveth us ground to believe, that they being in the covenant may be so wrapt up in it, as also to be wrapt up in the *bundle of life*, and did it give us but as good hopes of the *heathens* (of whom it rather speaks very sadly) as it doth of such *infants*, I should be as forward as any to perswade my self and others, that they were in a hopeful condition. For such infants, suppose they have not actual faith, so as to exert it, yet they may have it infused in the habit, they are born in the *Church*, and in the *covenant*, and what the faith of the *Church*, and of their *believing parents* may avail them, I do not now particularly inquire into! . . . And whereas mention was made of an *anticipating and preventing grace of God, by which without faith he might be saved*; I conceive and believe that it is

abundant *anticipating and preventing grace*, when either in *him* or in *any*, God beginneth and worketh faith to lay hold on *Christ*. But such a preventing grace as to accept us for *Christ's sake without faith in Christ*, the Scripture mentioneth not, is a new *notion* of a *young divine*, which without better proof must not command our belief, or impose upon our credulity."

Samuel Rutherford, a Scotch commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, is quoted by Dr. Briggs as follows:¹ "Suppose wee saw with our eyes, for twenty or thirty yeers together, a great furnace of fire, of the quantity of the whole earth, and saw there *Cain, Judas, Ahithophel, Saul*, and all the damned as lumps of red fire, and they boyling and louping for pain in a dungeon of everlasting brimstone, and the black and terrible devils with long and sharp-tooth'd whips of scorpions, lashing out scourges on them; and if wee saw there our neighbors, brethren, sisters, yea our dear

* Whither? p. 124.

children, wives, fathers, and mothers, swimming and sinking in that black lake, and heard the yelling, shouting, crying of our young ones and fathers, blaspheming the spotlesse justice of God; if wee saw this while wee are living here on earth, wee should not dare to offend the majesty of God, but should hear, come to Christ, and beleeve and be saved. But the truth is, if wee beleeve not Moses and the Prophets, neither should wee beleeve for this."

No one can read the foregoing extracts from the writings of these members of the Westminster Assembly and think that they believed in the salvation of all infants dying in infancy, or in the salvation of any part of the heathen world. These seven from whom quotations have been made represented a powerful influence in the Westminster Assembly. It is not at all probable that an Assembly with such an influence in it would have framed a confession which these men and their followers did not approve. After citing passages to prove that

Calvin believed in the damnation of infants, Dr. Briggs says:¹ "I have repeatedly challenged any one to produce a Westminster divine who held a contrary opinion. I am quite sure that none such can be found."

In closing his very able treatise on "Infant Baptism and Infant Salvation in the Calvinistic System," Dr. C. P. Krauth makes a sweeping challenge, though expressed in the modest form of a request:² "We request any and all defenders of [Westminster] Calvinism to produce a solitary Calvinistic standard or divine, from the First Helvetic Confession to the Westminster Confession, or from Calvin to Twisse, the prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, in which, or by whom, it is asserted or implied that all who die in infancy are certainly saved." This request was made in 1874, and no one has yet furnished the information desired. Dr. Charles W. Shields admits that Dr. Krauth "most clearly established

¹ How Shall We Revise? p. 103.

² P. 79.

the fact that some Calvinists, more obscure than famous, have held the doctrines of infant damnation, reprobation and perdition with frightful rigor." One of those pointed out by Dr. Krauth as holding this doctrine, whom Dr. Shields calls "more obscure than famous," was John Calvin. It is but fair, however, to say that Dr. Shields does not believe that Calvin taught that any infants dying in infancy are lost. He used 17 pages in the Presbyterian and Reformed Review (October, 1890) in an effort to prove his proposition. But his arguments certainly are not convincing.

IX.

Opinions of Some Other Divines.

The supralapsarian divines in the Westminster Assembly were not alone in holding the opinions peculiar to this type of Calvinism. The opinions of a few other divines are subjoined, to show how generally the view prevailed, that some infants dying in infancy are not admitted into heaven.

Richard Baxter, “the chief of English Protestant Schoolmen,” who was born in 1615 and died in 1691, says:¹ “After the writing of that book [Plain Scripture Proof of Infants’ Church Membership and Baptism], I wrote a postscript against the doctrine of Dr. Burgess and Mr. Thomas Bedford, which I supposed to go on the other extreme; and therein I answered part of a treatise of Dr. Samuel Ward’s, which Mr. Bedford published; which proved to be Mr.

¹ Life and Times, by Orme, Vol. II., pp. 251, 252.
(119)

Thomas Gataker's, whom I defend, who is Dr. Ward's censor; but I knew it not till Mr. Gataker after told me. But, after these writings, I was greatly in doubt whether it be not certain that all the infants of true believers are justified and saved, if they die before actual sin. My reason was, because it is the same justifying, saving covenant of grace which their parents and they are in, and as real *faith* and *repentance* is that condition on the parents' part which giveth them their right to actual remission, and adoption: so to be the *children* of such is all the condition which is required in infants, in order to the same benefits; and without asserting this, the advantage of the Anabaptists is greater than every one doth imagine. But I never thought with Dr. Ward that all *baptized children* had this benefit, and *qualitative* sanctification also; nor with Dr. Burgess and Mr. Bedford, that all converted at age, had inherent seminal grace in baptism certainly given them; nor with Bishop Davenant, that all justly bap-

tized had *relative grace* of justification and adoption; but only that all the infants of *true believers* who have right to the covenant and baptism *in foro coeli*, as well as *in foro ecclesiae*, have also thereby right to the pardon of original sin, and to adoption, and to heaven, which right is by baptism sealed and delivered to them. This I wrote of to Mr. Gataker who returned me a kind and candid answer, but such as did not remove my scruples; and this occasioned him to print Bishop Davenant's Disputations with his answer. The opinion which I most incline to, is the same which the Synod of Dort expresseth, and that which I conjecture Mr. Davenant meant, or I am sure came next to it."

Mr. Baxter raised the objection,¹ "but a parent then can have no more comfort fromanie promise of God concerning his child dying than an infidel," to which Mr. Gataker, who was a member of the Westminster Assembly, replied as follows: "It followeth

¹ How Shall We Revise? p. 105.

not. God hath made in Scripture manie promises of blessing the seed of the faithful for their parents' sake, and of his loving affection to them for their godlie progenitors, which yet how far forth and in what manner he may please and shall see good to express and make good unto the issue of such, we must, for ought I see, leave to his gracious pleasure without peremptory determination of ought therein." The foregoing quotations from Baxter and Gataker seem to imply that it was the opinion both of the Synod of Dort, and of the Westminster Assembly that there is no salvation for any of the heathen or any of their children who die in infancy, and that only a part (the elect) of the children of believers, dying in infancy are saved.

Dr. Thomas Ridgeley (1667-1734), an eminent Independent divine, in his "Body of Divinity," which was a course of lectures upon the Westminster Assembly's Catechism, devotes considerable space to the discussion of "The Condition of those who

Die in Infancy.”¹ The following extracts from this discussion will shew that this learned theological professor would not affirm that all infants dying in infancy are saved: “Let us consider the punishment due to original sin, as such, namely, in those who are charged with no other guilt than that of Adam’s first sin. This more especially respects those who die in their infancy, before they are capable of making any addition to it. Concerning these, I cannot but conclude with Augustine, in his defence of original sin against the Pelagians, that the punishment is the most mild of any.” (See page 12 of this work.) “The Pelagians, and those who verge towards their scheme, have concluded that they [infants] are all saved; supposing that they are innocent, and not in the least concerned in Adam’s sin. This, however, is to set aside the doctrine we are maintaining; and I cannot think their reasoning very conclusive.

¹ *Body of Divinity* (New York, 1885), Vol. I., pp. 417-419.

Others, who do not deny original sin, suppose, notwithstanding, that the guilt of it is atoned for by the blood of Christ. This would be a very agreeable notion, could it be proved; and all that I shall say in answer to it is, that it wants confirmation." Again, "Others have concluded that all the infants of believing parents, dying in infancy, are saved; supposing that they are interested in the covenant of grace, in which God promises that he will be a God to believers and their seed. This would be a very comfortable thought to those who have hope concerning their own state. I cannot find, however, that the argument in support of it is sufficiently maintained." Finally, "The condemnation of infants, who have no other guilt than that of original sin, will be more tolerable than that of the heathen, inasmuch as they had no natural capacities of doing good or evil."

George Keith, who was at one time a distinguished Quaker, published at Philadelphia, in 1689, a work entitled, "The Pres-

byterian and Independent Visible Churches in New England and elsewhere, Brought to the Test, and examined according to the Doctrine of the holy Scriptures, in their Doctrine, Ministry, Worship, Constitution, Government, Sacraments and Sabbath Day." This book was reprinted in London in 1691. In this work he inquires:¹ "Where now shall these men find any place in Scripture to prove that there are any *reprobate Infants*? or that any Infants dying in Infancy go to Hell, and perish eternally, only for *Adam's sin*, although that sin was forgiven to Adam, and thousands more equally guilty, by their own confession? If they shall allege, as some do, that place in 1 Cor. vii. 14, *For the unbelieving Husband is sanctified by the Wife* (viz. that believeth) and *the unbelieving Wife is sanctified by the Husband*, else were your children unclean, but now are they holy, yet this cannot prove their intention: for they dare not confidently say, that all Infants of *believing Parents* are elected,

¹Pp. 83, 84.

otherwise they must say, that *Esau* was elected, both whose Parents were Believers. Although some in Church-Covenant have gloried, that none of their children, while Infants, were Reprobates, because they were in covenant, and yet at that same time pleading that *Esau* was a Reprobat in his Mother's Belly, forgetting that both *Esau's* Parents were more holy than they. And if any further urge, *If there be no reprobate Infants, that then all Infants are sanctified and holy, both the children of unbelieving Parents, as well as of Believers.* I answer; it doth not follow by any necessary consequence, although to admit of that Consequence, is much more tolerable, than to say, that any Infants perish eternally, only for *Adam's* sin. And as for the general state of Infants, and how they are particularly disposed of immediately after Death, who die in Infancy, seemeth a great depth, and is a great mystery, and is best known unto the Lord: For it is generally granted, that God hath his way to reach to Infants, and

deal with them, both in the Womb, and upon the Mother's Breasts; and therefore let us leave secret things unto God, until he reveal them, and be satisfied with what he hath revealed."

Mr. Keith was answered by James Allen, Joshua Moody, Samuel Willard and Cotton Mather. "These were all men of fame, the most eminent American ministers of their time. Samuel Willard was pastor of the South Church, Boston, and vice-principal of Harvard College, the author of the most important American work on Dogmatic Theology up to his date." Cotton Mather was a voluminous writer and a brilliant scholar. These men affixed their names to the preface of a book entitled "The Principles of the Protestant Religion maintained, and Churches of New England in the Profession and Exercise thereof defended, against the Calumnies of one George Keith, a Quaker, in a Book lately published at Pennsylvania, to undermine them both." This book was published in Boston in 1690. The Boston

ministers replied to the foregoing indictment of Mr. Keith as follows:¹ (Sec. 6, p. 84.) "Here we are challenged to prove that there are Reprobate Infants, or *such as go to hell for Adam's sin only*: to which we reply: 1. He himself grants (p. 88) that *men generally* (and why not *universally?*) *are children of wrath by nature*: and he will not deny but that by *nature* is intended *that natural condition they were born into the world in* (and then it must needs concern *Infants* as well as others), and this too is by *Adam's sin transferred upon them, and his corrupt image communicated to them*. 2. That hence children in their natural birth are under a sentence of condemnation to dye, is a necessary consequence. 3. That God hath nowhere revealed to us that he hath accepted of the satisfaction of Christ for all that dye in their Infancy; and where there is no revelation, there is no ground for Faith. 4. That there is merit enough for damnation in them, else it would be unjust

¹Pp 78, 79.

that they should be under *condemnation*. 5. That this sentence hath been actually executed upon some Infants, Rom. v. 14, they never sinned actually, and yet they died, and it was the same death spoken of in verse 12. If therefore the text which some of ours use, 1 Cor. vii. 14, should not prove it, it follows not that no other can: and yet we suppose there is thus much in *that* too, viz., that till parents do openly profess the gospel and submit to it, as long as they abide in their Gentilism, their children were also unclean, and so apparently lying under guilt and lyable to eternal death. And then he chargeth some of our church covenant, for *glorying that none of their children were Reprobates while Infants*; we declare it to be a slander: we never affixed election to a *visible* relation to the Church of Christ." The Boston ministers admit the charge that Mr. Keith brings against them, and undertake to defend their position. They also hold that there are no elect among the pagans, which, of course, means that all the

children of the pagans are consigned to eternal death along with their parents.

Mr. Keith thought that the heathen who “were diligent to frame their lives according to the light that was in them” might be saved. He wrote:¹ “But if these men who own that said Confession of Faith [the Westminster] enquire, whether all these honest *Gentiles* that lived in the world, or do now live in the world, who have not had Christ crucified, outwardly preached unto them, but were diligent to frame their lives, according to the light that was in them, died in a state of salvation? I say, yea, they did; and this I may the rather say, according to their own doctrine. For what if they had not the perfect Knowledge and Faith of Christ crucified, when they lived? Yet they might have it at their Death; to wit, in the passing through the valley of the shadow of death, according to Psalm xxiii. 4. Even when they are not able to

¹P. 112.

demonstrate unto the Living what is then revealed unto them."

To this the Boston ministers reply:¹ "That there are any elect among pagans, who never had the gospel offered to them, is not only without Scripture warrant, but against its testimony as hath been agen and agen made evident."

Again, Mr. Keith says:² "Christ the second, *Adam*, by his death, for all that died in *Adam*, doth give unto all his free Gift, that cometh upon all unto Justification of Life; and thus the Plaster is as broad as the Sore, and the Medicine as universal as the Disease; and it is not simply the Sin or Disease, but the refusing and rejecting the Medicine and Physician, that is the cause of any man's final destruction." The Boston ministers answer:³ "What he saith (p. 88), that all have an opportunity or possibility to be converted and become the chil-

¹Pp 92, 93.

²P. 88.

³P. 80.

dren of God is ambiguous; If the word possibility be *exegetical* of the former; viz., *opportunity*, it is nonesense, for these two are Dispartes, if he intends them disjunctively, we deny not a possibility, for all men are salvable; but for an opportunity we renounce that, for where the means of salvation are not, there is no opportunity. But what is all this to the purpose? or what doth it make against the reprobation of infants? We must be led a wild-goose chase if we follow him in all his absurd digressions." There can be no doubt that these quotations from the Boston ministers clearly teach that the heathen nations and their infant offspring are all reprobates.

Rev. W. M. Hetherington refers to "current reports,"¹ in 1714, to the effect that "Mr. John Simson, professor of divinity at Glasgow, taught Arminian and Pelagian tenets." Mr. Hetherington continues:² "The course of defection on which the

¹ History of the Church of Scotland, p. 337.

² *Ibid.*, 340.

Church of Scotland had entered became more and more apparent every year, and the Assembly of 1717 was guilty of several acts more glaringly evil than those of its predecessors. The case of Professor Simson was finally decided by this Assembly; and although it was clearly proved that he had taught Arminian and Pelagian tenets, the Assembly merely found that he had vented some opinions not necessary to be taught in divinity.” But the charge against this man was not to be allowed to pass so easily, so it was renewed, and in 1729, he was suspended,¹ “with an additional declaration, that it was not fit that he should be further employed in teaching divinity and instructing youth designed for the ministry.” Mr. Hetherington shows a very strong bias against Professor Simson and the “errors” with which he charges him. Among the “errors” charged, according to Dr. Briggs,² is the following: “That it is more than

¹*Ibid.*, 348.

²American Presbyterianism, Appendix, p.lxxxix.

probable, that all unbaptized infants dying in infancy are saved; and that it is manifest, if God should deny his grace to all, or any of the children of infidels, he would deal more severely with them than he did with fallen angels." The Church of Scotland, in convicting Professor Simson for holding this view, was simply enforcing the common orthodoxy of the age.

Dr. Isaac Watts (1674-1748) "could as a Calvinist," says Dr. Krauth¹ "find no escape from the doctrine that there are reprobate infants, and that they oftentimes die in infancy. He could not as a Calvinist receive the doctrine of a mitigated punishment of them. In pure desperation, in the struggle between the necessities of his system, and his instincts as a human creature, he embraces the theory that *reprobate infants are probably annihilated at death.*"

Dr. Watts wrote:² "Neither have we any

¹ P. 72.

² Works of Isaac Watts, Vol. III., pp. 497-500 (Leeds Edition).

intimation from Scripture, that all the bodies of infants will be raised again at the great day, in order to come into judgment: And if we will suffer ourselves to think and judge without prejudice, we may find it highly probable, that there are many thousands of infant bodies which will never be restored to life, nor their persons be summoned to judgment in the last great day; and for these two reasons: I. . . . Nor can we reasonably suppose, that the most gracious God, who has never threatened it, will raise these infant bodies into an endless life, merely to suffer everlasting anguish and pain in the body. II. . . . Infants have done no works of sin and righteousness: They are not moral agents in the infant-state; and it is not said in Scripture that such shall be brought into judgment. . . . But the infant offspring of those who have repented of sin, and accepted of the Covenant of Grace, are, in my opinion, included in the blessings of the Covenant of Abraham, which come upon Gentile believers and their seed,

as well as on the Jews through Jesus Christ. . . . It is therefore only the children of wicked parents concerning whom I suppose the wisdom, justice and mercy of God will join to destroy them entirely by death, or to resume the forfeited life of soul and body. It seems evident to me, that though there are some hints and reasonable hopes of the happy resurrection of the offspring of good men to be derived from Scripture, yet all other children in this world are also brought down to death for the sin of Adam by the word of God, and they are left in death. But neither reason or Scripture, so far as I can find, provides any happiness or unhappiness, any reward or punishment for them in the world to come; and how can we go further than reason or Scripture will lead us? And if I may frankly speak my own sentiments here, I would say: Since neither reason nor Scripture certainly and plainly teach us anything concerning the souls of the infants of wicked men after death, and if I must not leave them in a state of non-

existence, I would much rather choose to suppose them at the death of the body entered into a new and personal state of trial than I would condemn them to a wretched resurrection and eternal misery for nothing else, but because they were born of Adam, the original transgressor. This is only a comparative thought by the way. But to pursue and support my present scheme of their annihilation at death, I must answer two or three objections."

Dr. Nathanael Emmons (1745-1840) on this side of the ocean held a similar view. He says:¹ "It appears from what has been said concerning native depravity, that if children die before they become moral agents, it is most rational to conclude that they are annihilated. As they are totally destitute of moral exercises which are either virtuous or sinful, they do not appear to be proper subjects of praise or blame, reward or punishment. It is certainly supposable that children may exist in this world some space

¹System of Divinity, Vol. I., pp. 510, 511.

of time, before they become moral agents; but how long that space may be, whether an hour, a day, a month, or a year, or several years, as many suppose, we do not presume to determine. But during that space, whether longer or shorter, they are not moral agents, nor consequently accountable creatures in the sight of God or man. It is rational to conclude, therefore, that God will not treat them as accountable creatures, nor reward or punish them. Of course, we must conclude that they will be annihilated. This was the opinion of Dr. Watts, and it seems to be well founded.

"If any children are saved who die soon after they become moral agents, they are undoubtedly regenerated before they are taken out of the world. They stand in the same relation to and connection with Adam, that the rest of mankind do, and become sinful before they become holy, in consequence of his apostacy. And for this reason they need to be renewed and sanctified, as well as adult persons, in order to be qualifi-

fied for the enjoyments and employments of heaven. As they are moral agents, they are capable of having holy, after they have had unholy affections; and God is able to produce holy, as well as unholy affections in their heart. If he sanctified Jeremiah and John the Baptist from the womb, or as early as they needed to be and could be sanctified, then he is able to sanctify those young children who die soon after they become moral agents, before he takes them out of the world and conducts them to heaven, if he ever does save such. He has not been pleased to inform us expressly whether he does renew the hearts of the whole, or a part, or none, of those little children who die soon after they become moral agents. As they then become morally depraved, it is plain that, in point of justice, he may then leave them all to perish in their native depravity and guilt. Or in mercy he may renew them all. But from all the light we can find in Scripture on this subject, it seems to be the most probable opin-

ion that he renews only some of those who die soon after they become morally depraved and guilty. He has indeed given some encouragements, or conditional promises, to believing parents, that he will renew and save their children if they die soon after they have become sinners. But they must be left in his holy, sovereign and merciful hands."

It will be observed that Dr. Emmons divides dying children into two classes, viz., those who "die before they become moral agents" and those "who die soon after they become moral agents." According to his teaching the first class are all annihilated; while "only some of those who die soon after they become morally depraved and guilty" are "renewed" by the Lord and saved.

Richard Watson says:¹ "Some Calvinists have, indeed, to get rid of the difficulty [eternal punishment of infants], or rather to put it out of sight, consigned them to annihilation." So it seems that a number

¹Theological Institutes, Vol. II., p. 344.

of respectable Calvinistic scholars held to the theory that at least a part of those dying in infancy are annihilated, and that this conclusion was reached in the attempt to escape the consequence of sending non-elect infants to perdition.

President Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) teaches very plainly that some infants dying in infancy are lost. In his "Doctrine of Original Sin Defended" he more than once strongly implies the doctrine of infant damnation. He says:¹ "We may well argue from these things, that infants are not looked upon by God as sinless, but that they are by nature children of wrath, seeing this terrible evil comes so heavily on mankind in infancy. But besides these things, which are observable concerning the mortality of infants in general, there are some particular cases of the death of infants, which the Scripture sets before us, that are attended with circumstances, in a particular manner giving evi-

¹ Works of President Edwards, Vol. II., pp. 378-381.

dences of the sinfulness of such, and their just exposedness to divine wrath.” He then cites the destruction of the infants in Sodom, the destruction of the infants among the “ancient inhabitants of Canaan,” “the destruction of the infants of the Midianites” by the “command of Moses,” and the destruction of the infants in Jerusalem under the New Testament dispensation. On these instances he observes: “And here it must be remembered, that these very destructions of that city and land are spoken of in those places forementioned, as clear evidences of God’s wrath, to all nations which shall behold them. And if so, they were evidences of God’s wrath towards infants; who, equally with the rest, were the subjects of the destruction. If a particular kind or rank of persons, which made a very considerable part of the inhabitants, were from time to time partakers of the overthrow, without any distinction made in divine providence, and yet this was no evidence at all of God’s displeasure with any of them; then a being

the subject of such a calamity could not be an evidence of God's wrath against any of the inhabitants, to the reason of *all nations*, or any nation, or so much as one person." The reasoning of President Edwards appears to be as follows: since infants frequently suffer physical pain and death because of sin, therefore some of them at least suffer eternal death for the same reason.

Again, he says:¹ "To think of poor little *infants* bearing such torments for Adam's sin, as they sometimes do in this world, and these torments ending in death and annihilation [as some claim], may sit easier on the imagination, than to conceive of their suffering eternal misery for it. But it does not at all relieve one's *reason*." President Edwards, as many others of his time, followed a certain method of "*reason*" to the unreasonable extent of consigning "non-elect" infants to eternal misery!

An edition of a Theological Dictionary issued in 1810, by Rev. Charles Buck, con-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 494.

tains an article on the "Salvation of Infants." The first part of the article reads as follows: "Various opinions concerning the future state of infants have been adopted. Some think all dying infants are annihilated; for they say, infants being incapable of moral good or evil, are not proper objects of reward or punishment. Others think that they share a fate similar to adults; a part saved, and a part perish. Others affirm that all are saved because all are immortal and all are innocent. Others, perplexed with these diverse sentiments, think better to leave the subject untouched." This quotation shows two things: (1) That there had been a more general belief in the damnation of some infants than prevailed at the opening of the nineteenth century; and, (2) that the interpretation of this doctrine was then in its transition period.

In 1662, Rev. Michael Wigglesworth published his "remarkable *Day of Doom*, a poem which preserves, as in amber, the ideas of his time and school. It was very popular,

reaching a sixth edition, 1715, and others since." The poet describes the Last Judgment, and in doing so brings reprobate infants before the bar of justice. They plead for pardon, but the Judge replies:

" You sinners are; and such a share as sinners
may expect,
Such you shall have, for I do save none but mine
own elect.
Yet to compare your sin with theirs who lived a
longer time,
I do confess, yours is much less, though every
sin's a crime.
A crime it is; therefore in bliss you may not
hope to dwell;
But unto you I shall allow the easiest room in
hell."

X.

The Transition in Interpretation.

There are very few to-day who interpret the words, "elect infants dying in infancy," to mean only a part of those who die in infancy, whether of Christian or heathen parents, are saved. The phrase, "elect infants dying in infancy," is explained in harmony with this general belief of the Christian Protestant world. But from the quotations presented in the preceding pages of this book, it is evident that the present general belief on this subject differs greatly from the views held by many eminent divines in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It has been shown that when the Westminster Confession of Faith was framed there were many who believed in the damnation of a large part of those who die in infancy. It has been shown that some of the members of the Assembly which framed

this Confession were very strong in this belief. But a great change has come about. What has affected this change? How has it been brought about? A volume could be written in answer to these questions. It is not proposed to say more here than merely to point out a few things worthy of mention in this transition period.

The case of Professor John Simson, of Glasgow, has already been mentioned. (See page 133 of this work.) But, one additional matter connected with that case must be referred to here. He was arraigned before the Assembly of 1717, at which time that body refused to convict him. Mr. Hetherington says:¹ “This culpable lenity appears to have arisen in a great measure from the deplorable fact, that a large proportion of the Assembly were themselves tainted with opinions equally unsound.” So it appears that in old orthodox Scotland the seeds of more liberal views were being planted about two hundred years ago.

¹ History of the Church of Scotland, p. 340.

Dr. Jonathan Dickinson (1688-1747), a prominent Presbyterian divine, and first president of the College of New Jersey, writing on the doctrine of infant salvation, said:¹ "It may be further urged against this proposition, 'That it dooms multitudes of poor infants to hell, who never committed any actual sin, and is therefore a doctrine so cruel and unmerciful as to be unworthy of God.' To this I answer, that greatest modesty becomes us in drawing any conclusions on this subject. We have indeed the highest encouragement to dedicate our children to Christ, since he has told us, *of such is the kingdom of heaven*; and the strongest reason for hope as to the happiness of those deceased infants, who have been thus dedicated to him. But God has not been pleased to reveal to us, how far he will extend his uncovenanted mercy, to others that die in infancy. As, on the one hand, I do not know that the Scripture anywhere assures us that they shall all be saved; so on the other hand,

¹ Sermons and Tracts, pp. 205, 206.

we have not (that I know of), any evidence from Scripture or the nature of things, that any of these will eternally perish. All those that die in infancy may (for ought we know) belong to the election of grace, and be predestined to the adoption of children. They may, in methods to us unknown, have the benefits of Christ's redemption applied to them, and thereby be made heirs of eternal glory. They are (it is true) naturally under the guilt and pollution of original sin; but they may, notwithstanding this, for anything that appears to the contrary, be renewed by the gracious influences of the Spirit of God, and thereby be made meet for eternal life. It therefore concerns us, without any bold and presumptuous conclusions, to leave them in the hands of that God, whose tender mercies are over all his works."

Dr. Dickinson does not assert that all infants dying in infancy will be saved, neither does he affirm that any such will be lost. He strongly implies that God may have his elect beyond the circle of the children of

believers. It is noticeable that he nowhere refers to either the Articles of the Synod of Dort or to the Westminster Confession for a confessional basis for the hope he here expresses. Is there not a good reason for this? What particular part of either could he have referred to as such a basis? His hope was higher than the interpretation which was then generally placed upon either of these confessional statements. But this hope which was above the confessional statement, in time was read into the Confession.

Augustus M. Toplady (1740-1778), "a Calvinistic divine of the Church of England," wrote:¹ "But you observe, page 109, that, 'with regard to infants, the rubrick declares it is certain by God's word that children which are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved.' I firmly believe the same. Nay, I believe more; I am convinced that the souls of all departed infants whatever, whether baptized or unbaptized, are with God in

¹ Works, Complete in One Volume, pp. 645, 646.

glory. And I think my belief warranted by an authority which cannot err, Matt. xviii. 14. You have, therefore, no occasion to lug in children by head and shoulders, page 110, and to ask, with an air of insult, where then is the ‘doctrine of absolute, irrespective predestination and reprobation, which would include children as well as adults?’ I believe that, in the decree of predestination to life, God included all whom he hath decreed to take away in infancy; and that the decree of reprobation has nothing to do with them.”

Again, Dr. Toplady said:¹ “If Christ died only for them that believe, or in whom faith is wrought; it follows, that faith is an exceedingly great and precious gift. It may be worth our while to inquire into Latimer’s definition of what faith is.” He continues: “No objection can hence arise [i. e., because Christ died only for them that believe] against the salvation of such as die in infancy (all of whom are undoubtedly saved); nor yet against

¹*Ibid.*, pp. 142, 143.

the salvation of God's elect among the heathen, Mahomedans, and others. The Holy Spirit is able to inspire the grace of virtual faith into those hearts (especially at the moment of dissolution) which are incapable of exerting the explicit act of faith." Dr. Toplady is explicit in reference to the salvation of all infants dying in infancy.

In 1810 the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was organized. In 1813 an article was prepared for "Buck's Theological Dictionary," which set forth four points in which this branch of Presbyterians dissented from the Westminster Confession of Faith. In the third point the affirmation was made "that all infants dying in infancy are saved through Christ and sanctification of the Spirit." This particular part of the Presbyterian family now has the following section (54) in its Confession of Faith: "All infants dying in infancy, and all persons who have never had the faculty of reason, are regenerated and saved." In 1891, Dr. B. B. Warfield, Professor in Princeton

Seminary, said that the Cumberland Presbyterians "perhaps alone of Christian denominations have embodied in their Confession their conviction that all infants, dying such, are saved." It has already been shown that 105 Presbyteries against 68, in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, voted to have "embodied in their Confession their conviction that all infants, dying such, are saved." "Their conviction" was not "embodied in their Confession" because there was not quite the "constitutional two-thirds majority," which the law required. It has also been noted that while the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland did not undertake to revise the Westminster Confession, it did, nevertheless, in its "Declaratory Act" affirm that "in accepting the Standards it is not required to be held that any who die in infancy are lost." The Free Church of Scotland did practically the same thing; and the Presbyterian Church of England in its new Articles of Faith omits the reference to "elect infants,"

Dr. James P. Wilson (1769-1830), for twenty-four years pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, says:¹ "Since indisposition to holiness is a universal character of our nature; and infants inherit disease and death, the wages of sin; there must exist some connexion between us and our first parent, whereby we are justly introduced into the world, in his image and lapsed state, without our choice. This doctrine is plainly asserted in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans and elsewhere; nevertheless it does not follow, that any dying in infancy are lost; since their salvation by Christ is more than possible." Dr. Wilson, on this side of the Atlantic, like Dr. Toplady on the other side, "makes a very decided advance" toward the doctrine of the salvation of all infants dying in infancy.

Dr. Archibald Alexander (1772-1851), the first professor in the Princeton Theological

¹ *Essay on the Probation of Fallen Men* (1827), pp. 15, 16.

Seminary, and “one of the founders of Princeton theology,” in a letter to Bishop Mead, wrote:¹ “As infants, according to the creed of all Reformed Churches, are infected with original sin, they cannot without regeneration be qualified for the happiness of heaven. Children dying in infancy must therefore be regenerated without the instrumentality of the Word; and as the Holy Scriptures have not informed us that any of the human family departing in infancy will be lost, we are permitted to hope that all such will be saved.”

Dr. Lyman Beecher (1775-1863) wrote a series of articles in Volume I. (1828) of the “Spirit of the Pilgrims,” pp. 42, 78 and 149, “in the midst of his memorable career in Boston and of the sharp contest with Unitarians,” in which he “repudiated, with characteristic energy and boldness of speech, the doctrine of infant damnation.” It would be interesting to know whether he was acquainted with the writings of the Boston

¹ Life of Archibald Alexander, p. 585.

ministers on this subject. Be that as it may, Dr. Beecher's pen doubtless contributed largely to the modern interpretation.

Dr. George L. Prentiss quotes from the "Analysis of a System of Theology," by Dr. John H. Livingston, of the Dutch Reformed Church, as follows:¹ "It has frequently been objected against the system of divine truth as explained in this volume, that on the principles it advances the salvation of infants is not possible. In answer to this we observe: adults are not saved for their faith, and although faith is represented as that act by which the believer is united to his Saviour—and thereby a basis is constituted for the imputation of the Saviour's righteousness—yet this union and all the subsequent progress in sanctification are effected by the direct operation of the Spirit of God on the heart of the believer. The Spirit of God is therefore in the strictest and fullest sense the bond of union. Faith is the first act of the renewed soul assenting

¹The Presbyterian Review, Vol. IV., p. 558.

and responding to and manifesting the work of the Spirit. . . . We do not know that the Spirit of God cannot be the bond of uniting to the Saviour those who are not capable of exercising or manifesting that they exercise faith on him. Infants certainly are (humanly speaking) as suitable subjects for the operations of divine grace as adults. It is therefore evident that we have advanced no principles which render it impossible to believe in the salvation of infants. The feelings of our nature prompt us to hope on this subject more than we dare assert. God has imposed silence on our tongues (pp. 328-9)."

The same author quotes from Rev. William Anderson, of Glasgow, in the introductory essay to "Words of Comfort for Parents Bereaved of Little Children" (pp. xx.-xxiv.), in order to show the sentiment in Scotland in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹

"Our Protestantism, commencing with the sovereign decree of election, equitably

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 560, 561.

assigned to those who died in infancy their proportional share of the *mercy*, but not less equitably their proportional share of the *judgment*—the judgment of reprobation or preterition; so that calculating the infant's share by that of the adult's, as manifested in faith and a holy life, there was left a vast multitude who perished eternally. Parental affection early demanded, and easily attained, the modification, that the whole of such children of *pious parents* as died in infancy should be included in the decree of salvation. With this the heart of Scotch Protestantism for a long time remained satisfied. With the exception of those born of pious parents, and the proportion saved by the general decree, all the rest, in millions upon millions, were doomed to everlasting woe. For two centuries and a half after the Reformation this was the prevailing dogma, and when, fifty years ago [1810], Common-Sense, warming into life out of the dreadful torpidity, began to vindicate the character of God, the rights of

Christ, and the feelings of humanity, it was with hesitancy and bated breath, and amid suspicions of their soundness in the faith, that a few voices were heard suggesting the *possibility* that all who die in infancy are saved.

"The question was agitated in this form for a considerable time, and Common-Sense gained ground. About forty years ago [1820], when he who sketches this review entered on the public ministration of the gospel, there were found a few lifting up their voices in protest and advocacy, that it was not only *possible* but *probable* that all who died in infancy, having been guilty of no actual sin—no rejection of him who was appointed the world's Redeemer—were saved.

"I must now speak in the first person. As having been from the beginning (*ab ovo*, as they say) of anti-slavery tendencies, I 'cast in my lot' with the pleaders for *probability*, to share the odium of being suspected—suspected! *denounced*, as being un-

sound, and licentiously squandering the salvation of Christ. But Common-Sense was with us and we prospered. Nay; that is not the accurate account. It protested against our pottering limitations. Mere *probability* of all being saved implied, it said, the *possibility* of some or many of infant spirits, who have neither done, nor spoken, nor thought an evil thing, being consigned to the fires of hell. Civilization, not to speak of piety, will not endure it. You must progress, reverend sirs. So we of the anti-slavery school ascended the platform to proclaim the *certainty* of the salvation of all dying in infancy—when the pro-slavery Conservatism of Dogma was now in its turn reduced to a feeble protestation that we were wise above what is written—as if it were not written that God is just, which he would not be were he to consign to hell fire any infant spirit. All Common-Sense says Amen. You need not try by sophiscation to reduce the judgment. . . . Simply, it is most dreadful to **think** with what thoughts of God the mind

of Scotland was impregnated, and *that* not long since.

“Not long since! There remain at this moment [1860] not a few of the old Conservative party, who hold by the antique doctrine of the *possible* damnation, at least, of an incalculable multitude of infant spirits. *I know some of them*, and they are every whit as kind-hearted as myself. It is dogma which, like a Cerberus, stands in their way, preventing their entertainment of the blessed hope that Christ’s reward, otherwise so meagre, shall be magnified by his receiving into his kingdom every human soul which was rescued in infancy from the corrupting influences of this world. But even this dogmatic difficulty is in process of being overcome. One, confessed by all to be the most acute and eloquent of living pleaders for the theory of a limited Atonement, has recently published a treatise in which he declares his conviction that the stroke of death is never appointed to fall on any infant who was not included in the elective decree. The prin-

ciple will be eagerly laid hold of, I am persuaded, by many besides the brethren of that eminent divine and preacher; so that we shall soon enjoy a very wide proclamation throughout our land, made without hesitancy or any disheartening potterings with mere possibilities or probabilities, that all children dying in infancy are saved; so that the dark imagination of any one of them being doomed to everlasting woe shall be excluded from our theology and pulpits; no more to torment the minds of the people with its horrors."

Dr. Charles Hodge (1797-1878) may be cited as the next land-mark in this transition period. In his "Commentary on Romans,"¹ he says: "If, without personal participation in the sin of Adam, all men are subject to death, may we not hope that, without personal acceptance of the righteousness of Christ, all who die in infancy are saved?" What Dr. Hodge here expresses as a "hope" is set forth with greater posi-

¹ Edition 1870, p. 137.

tiveness at a later date in his *Systematic Theology*,¹ where he speaks of “the common doctrine of evangelical Protestants:” “All who die in infancy are saved. This is inferred from what the Bible teaches of the analogy between Adam and Christ. ‘As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.’ (Rom. v. 18, 19.) We have no right to put any limit on these general terms, except what the Bible itself places upon them. The Scriptures nowhere exclude any class of infants, baptized or unbaptized, born in Christian or in heathen lands, of believing or unbelieving parents, from the benefits of the redemption of Christ. All the descendants of Adam, except Christ, are under condemnation; all the descendants of Adam, except those of whom it

¹ Vol. I., p. 26.

is expressly revealed that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God, are saved. This appears to be the clear meaning of the Apostle, and therefore he does not hesitate to say that where sin abounded grace has much more abounded; that the benefits of redemption far exceed the evils of the fall; that the number of the saved far exceeds the number of the lost.” Dr. Hodge goes so far as to exempt infants from the exercise of faith, which would have been a very strange doctrine to Calvinists two or three hundred years ago. His position is, that¹ “faith is the condition of justification. That is, so far as adults are concerned, God does not impute the righteousness of Christ to the sinner, until and unless, he (through grace) receives and rests on Christ alone for his salvation.”

Dr. A. A. Hodge is very definite on this point:² “In the justification, therefore, of that majority of the elect which die in in-

¹ Systematic Theology, Vol. III , p 118.

² Princeton Review (1878), p. 315.

fancy, personal faith does not mediate.” And so it has been well said that “thus we have the doctrine of the universal salvation of infants elaborated at the expense of the vital principle of justification by faith only, and the Augustinian doctrine of original sin.”

But Dr. Shedd makes a statement which reads very different from the foregoing quotations:¹ “The regenerate infant believes, repents, and begins the struggle with remaining sin the moment his faculties admit of such activities. He has *latent* or *potential* faith, repentance, and sanctification.”

Dr. A. A. Hodge further says:² “The phrase ‘elect infants’ is precise and fit for its purpose. It is not intended to suggest that there are any infants not elect, but simply to point out the facts (a) that all infants are born under righteous condem-

¹ Proposed Revision of the Westminster Standards, p. 80.

² Commentary on the Confession of Faith, p. 240.

nation, and (*b*) that no infant has any claim in itself to salvation; and hence (*c*) the salvation of each infant, precisely as the salvation of every adult, must have its absolute ground in the sovereign election of God. This would be just as true if all adults were elected as it is now that only some adults are elected. It is therefore, just as true, although we have good reason to believe that *all* infants are elected. The Confession adheres in this place accurately to the facts revealed. It is certainly revealed that none, either adult or infant, are saved except on the ground of a sovereign election; that is, all salvation for the human race is pure grace. It is not positively revealed that all infants are elect, but we are left, for many reasons, to indulge in a highly probable hope that such is the fact. The Confession affirms what is certainly revealed, and leaves that which revelation has not decided to remain without the suggestion of a positive opinion upon one side or the other."

The foregoing quotations from the Hodges teach that there is at least a “probable hope” that infants dying in infancy are saved. Dr. Henry B. Smith also entertained such a hope as the following language shows:¹ “As to those who die in infancy, there is a well-grounded hope that they are of the elect.” Dr. Smith believed that the Westminster Confession of Faith contained the best confessional statement that had been made on the subject of infant salvation.

Dr. Shedd, in his Dogmatic Theology,² refers to “the supposition, now common in the evangelical Churches, that all infants dying in infancy, being elect, are ‘regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth.’” But when Dr. Shedd was opposing the revision of the Confession of Faith in his Church, he spoke more positively on this question:³ “As the tenet

¹ System of Christian Theology, pp. 322, 318.

² Vol. II., p. 713.

³ Proposed Revision of the Westminster Standards, p. 6.

[‘elect infants’] was formulated by the Assembly, it has been understood to mean: (a) that all infants dying in infancy are elected as a class, some being saved by covenanted mercy, and some by uncovenanted mercy; (b) that all infants dying in infancy are elected as a class—all alike, those within the Church and those outside of it, being saved by divine mercy, nothing being said of the covenant; (c) that dying infants are elected as individuals, some being elect and some non-elect. Probably each of these opinions had its representatives in the Assembly, and hence the indefinite form of the statement. The writer regards the first-mentioned view as best supported by Scripture and the analogy of faith; but there are many who advocate the second view, and perhaps there may be some who hold the third.”

Dr. E. D. Morris, for some years Professor of Systematic Theology in Lane Theological Seminary, writes:¹ “Large advances have

¹ *Theology of the Westminster Symbols*, p. 282.

been made, especially in this century, upon the Westminster teaching at this point. All infants, whether living to become adult or dying in infancy, are indeed to be regarded —to quote the language of the Auburn Declaration—as a part of the human family, and their sufferings and death, when they occur, are to be accounted for on the ground of their being involved in the general moral ruin of the race, induced by the apostacy of our first parents. But on the other hand, the broad proposition is now generally, if not universally admitted, that all infants dying in infancy, whether children of believers or the offspring of unregenerate parentage, whether in Christian or in pagan lands, and whether after the advent of Christ or before, are to be regarded as included in the election of grace, and therefore as regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit. This is the positive proposition of the proposed Revision, and it may be accepted as representing the present doctrine of evangelical Protestant-

ism generally. The Declaratory Act of the Free Church of Scotland, with some caution, affirms that, while the gospel is the ordinary means of salvation for those to whom it is made known, yet it does not follow, nor is the Confession to be held as teaching, that any who die in infancy are lost. If it be offered as a criticism upon the divines of Westminster that they did not attain to such a positive and catholic view, it should also be said to their praise that the largest confessional statement ever made on this interesting subject came from them. The symbolism of the Reformation will be searched in vain for any counterpart."

Dr. George L. Prentiss, a Professor in Union Theological Seminary, New York, says:¹ "The change from the position generally held by Calvinistic divines at the beginning, or in the middle, of the seventeenth century, to the ground taken by Dr. Charles Hodge in 1871, in his Systematic Theology, is simply immense. It amounts to a sort

¹ The Presbyterian Review, Vol. IV., p. 556

of revolution in theological opinion; a revolution all the more noteworthy from the quiet, decisive way in which it was at last accomplished, the general acquiescence in it, and also the apparent unconsciousness of its logical consequences."

It is probably safe to say that the majority of those who now subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith interpret, in some way, the phrase "elect infants dying in infancy," as meaning all infants who die in infancy. The transition in interpretation of this phrase has become most complete. A quotation from Dr. Henry J. Van Dyke will be an appropriate closing for this discussion.¹ "He [Calvin] assumes as a premise, which it is 'impossible to deny,' that God by his decree or predestination, and for no other reason than because it *seemed meet* to him to do so, has involved the *infant offspring* of many nations in eternal death *without remedy*. This is what he calls the *camel*. He tells his opponents

¹The Variations of Calvanism, pp. 40, 41.

that they *have swallowed it*; and he tells them the truth, for since the days of Augustine all Christians, except a few heretics, believed in infant damnation. Calvin on this point was only teaching up to the times. And he goes on to reason *a fortiori*, that having swallowed this camel, they ought not to strain at the *gnat*, viz.: ‘The Scripture doctrine that all were in the person of one made *liable* to eternal death.’ As against the opponents with whom he thus reasons, Calvin’s argument was *ad hominem* and unanswerable. But the times have changed, and the whole attitude of the argument is changed also. In our day even [Westminster] Calvinists *do not swallow the camel*. The doctrine that election runs the line of separation between the innumerable multitude upon whom *natural* death passes before they sin after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, predestinating *some of them* to salvation, and others to *eternal* death, *without remedy*, has passed away with other superstitions from the faith of the

Protestant world. So far as the Presbyterian Church is concerned, no man has contributed more to indicate and to produce this change than Dr. Charles Hodge. The salvation of all dying infants, with all the consequences it involves, is a characteristic feature of Princeton Theology. Not exclusively so, of course. The same truth is accepted and taught in all our Theological Seminaries. But where is the recognized Calvinistic authority prior to Hodge's Theology, in which it is taught explicitly and without qualification, that '*All who die in infancy are saved*' (Theology, Vol. I., 26). Lay this parallel with Calvin's *horrible decretum*, and follow out the Scripture argument by which it is sustained till it culminates and is crowned with the declaration 'it is more congenial to the nature of God to save than to destroy,' and how wide is the difference, how marked the contrast, in the spirit of their reasoning and in the conclusions they reach, between the Calvinism of Geneva and the Calvinism of Princeton.

An able opponent of revision said to me at the beginning of the discussion, that Dr. Hodge's views on the salvation of infants are not orthodox, and that his argument on the subject is the weakest part of his book, and that it was a great mistake to put what was only his private opinion into a great work on Theology."

The testimony, which it is proposed to submit, from councils, creeds, and individuals is now in. The case is submitted to the unbiased seeker after historical facts to say whether, in the framing of the Westminster Confession, it was the purpose of those making that creed to teach that there are non-elect infants who die in infancy, and that, consequently, such are lost. The question is not, what interpretation is now placed on this language of the Confession, but what meaning was placed on it when the book was framed. There have been several commentaries written on the Westminster Confession of Faith, but the most of them undertake to harmonize the Confession with

the modern interpretation, overlooking largely the historical side of the case. The best commentary that could be written on the Confession would be of a historical, rather than of a polemical character. The whole question resolves itself into a historical inquiry.

Date Due

F 25 '47

OC 8-'54

JUN 10 '54

MAY 05 1994

DEC 29 2014



Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01019 4076